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Response to my Four Critics

Sally Sedgwick

I am grateful to the Reviews Editor for the *Hegel Bulletin*, Susanne Herrmann-Sinai, for arranging this discussion of my book, *Time and History in Hegelian Thought and Spirit* (2023).[1] I appreciate this opportunity to clarify and expand on some of the main ideas of the book, including those that are the most challenging to defend. I also owe thanks, of course, to each of my four critics for giving their valuable time to this project. In the context of so few pages, it is not possible to respond to every criticism; I have had to pick and choose. In the process, I may have failed to do full justice to my critics' concerns.

Turning, first, to the response of Richard Bourke: he correctly represents a main aim of my book as that of challenging a standard, but in my view mistaken, interpretation of Hegel. As Bourke notes, the standard view is expressed, for instance, in the writings of the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–97), who in his *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* charges Hegel with a rigid apriorism and implausible optimism. On Burckhardt's account of Hegel, Bourke writes, 'the historical process necessarily took the form of "the rational, inevitable march of the world spirit"'. Hegel's claim that reason 'rules the world' was in Burckhardt's eyes that of a 'befuddled historical logician' imposing his preconceived optimism onto the messy facts of history. For Burckhardt and other serious historians seeking to record history accurately, the Hegelian narrative was not just self-serving but also offensive.

Bourke is right that my account of Hegel's commitments and objectives is significantly different. Although Hegel repeatedly asserts that reason rules the world, and that this 'actual' world is 'rational', it is crucial to recognize, as Bourke remarks, that 'everything hangs on what is meant by [Hegelian] reason and how it functions'. Bourke understands that one of my main tasks in the book is to address this challenge and set the record straight.

Bourke correctly represents my argumentative strategy as well. If Hegel is not guilty of an extravagant apriorism, how can we make sense of his insistence on the rationality of the actual? Bourke grasps my reasons for relying on Hegel's introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* to extract clues to the answer

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to this question. In those passages, Hegel tells us that his own—'philosophical' or 'philosophic' history—needs to be understood by means of a contrast with two other general methods, namely with 'original' and 'reflective' history. Hegel indicates in these paragraphs that his third alternative preserves as well as rejects features of these other two. What Hegel most admires about the method of 'original' history is its insistence upon an accurate, unbiased representation of the historical facts. Its greatest weakness, in his view, is its epistemological naïveté; it tends to ignore the extent to which any effort to get at the facts is, as Bourke aptly puts it, 'always *framed*'. In Bourke's words, there are, for Hegel, no 'pre-conceptual facts'.

I argue that Hegel is convinced that this insight is better appreciated by the 'reflective' historian. The reflective historian grasps, in a way that the original historian does not, that, as Hegel sometimes put it, wherever there is perception (versus mere sensation), there is thinking. (See my discussion beginning at *TH*: 2.1.3.) The reflective historian is in other words aware that her collection of empirical evidence invariably requires the unifying activity of concepts. As Hegel expresses the point in this context, the historian's activity is in this respect 'reflective'.

But I suggest that Hegel discovers weaknesses in the reflective method as well. Just as the original historian overestimates the extent to which she can gain unmediated access to the facts, the reflective historian is inclined to ascribe too much independence or autonomy to the concepts the philosopher brings to history in her effort to make sense of history. Reflective history in other words risks becoming excessively aprioristic. As such, it is insufficiently sensitive to the respect in which our concepts or ideas—no matter how abstract—are indebted to history.

How can Hegel's 'philosophical' approach steer clear of the excesses of both original and reflective methods? The challenge Hegel faces can be formulated in different ways: How can he consistently argue that reason 'rules the world', yet at the same time maintain that the philosopher of history is obliged to report the facts of history, and 'proceed in a historical, empirical fashion'? How can his philosophical approach grant the role of concepts in acts of perception without awarding concepts the status of *pure* apriority? Expressed differently, how can Hegel reconcile the realm of the rational with that of the actual? Or, how can he reconcile freedom and necessity with contingency or *fortuna*? On his account, a proper historical method is necessarily reflective. It must at the same time acknowledge, however, that there is no such thing as *pure* reflection. It must grant a role for concepts but recognize that those concepts are indebted as well as answerable to the realm of what 'is'. For Hegel, a proper historical method needs to be in some way a *hybrid* of original and reflective methods. As Bourke puts it, a proper method must be for Hegel 'philosophico-historical'.

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Hegel is aware of the appearance of conflict in the demands he expects his philosophical method to satisfy; he knows that he seems to want to have his cake and eat it, too. It is for precisely this reason that, in the opening pages of his 'Introduction', he describes his task as that of providing a solution to an apparent 'contradiction'. As Bourke remarks, 'everything hangs on what is meant by [Hegelian] reason and how it functions'. What, precisely, is the conception of reason by means of which Hegel believes his particular 'philosophical' approach is able to steer clear of the contradiction?

It is of course gratifying to see that Bourke appreciates my main objectives and argumentative moves. Because he does not challenge my general interpretation, I confine my remarks in what follows to his characterization of my account. In a few instances, he might be read to suggest a view somewhat different from the one I defend.

As Bourke observes, my main challenge, simply put, is to defend an interpretation of Hegelian reason as historical. I argue, first, that Hegel's commitment to a historicized reason should not be taken to imply that he advocates a reductive empiricism. Hegel does not try to absorb the rational into the actual or reduce reason to history or nature. As I argue, he is too much of a Kantian (too much of a rationalist and admirer of the reflective approach to history) to go this route. With Kant, Hegel awards human reason a significant degree of autonomy from nature and history, and he recognizes the dangers for human freedom of failing to do so.

I furthermore argue that the historical nature of reason means for Hegel more than simply that its concepts and norms express or manifest themselves in history. In a few instances, Bourke might be read to suggest that this is the gist of my interpretative proposal. He could be taken to imply as much, for example, when he remarks that the historical nature of Hegelian freedom is exemplified in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, because in that work Hegel 'traces' 'developments [of spirit] across time'. Bourke conveys a similar impression when he describes my aim to argue that 'the human mind for Hegel is located in history: its content and commitments unfold in time'.

I certainly agree that Hegel sets out to trace the various ways in which reason objectifies or manifests itself (whether in world history, philosophy or nature). But this thesis, although correct, is also incomplete. If Hegelian reason is historical simply on account of the fact that it is capable of expressing itself in the realm of the actual, then we would seem to be justified in concluding that Hegelian reason is in this respect virtually indistinguishable from its Kantian counterpart. After all, although Kant argues that human reason generates laws and concepts that are purely a priori and that as such contain nothing empirical, he holds that such laws and concepts can govern or legislate over the realm of the empirical. For Kant, in other words, pure reason can and does objectify itself. It does so,

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for instance, in influencing human motivation and action, in shaping our actual institutions, and in making our experience of nature possible.

Bourke captures my view of Hegelian reason more precisely when he notes that I urge that we reject 'Marx's popular charge that Hegelian method proceeds by descending "from heaven to earth"—from a realm of eternal ideas to the world of contingent affairs'. Bourke writes that, on my interpretation of Hegel, 'human reason, since it develops across history, is affected by the contingency of events'. Notice that the point is not just that reason *expresses* or *objectifies* itself in history. Bourke accurately represents my position as implying the stronger thesis that, for Hegel, the historical nature of reason is tied to the fact that its nature is somehow also *affected* by the realm of the actual.

This is my thesis, but its precise meaning is by no means obvious. What is it about human reason, exactly, that is affected by the realm of the actual, according to Hegel? Does he propose that it is the nature of reason itself as a faculty or capacity that is so affected? Or, is his view that reason's concepts and laws (what I sometimes refer to as its 'content') are somehow conditioned by the realm of the actual? If the latter is the case, what remains of reason's sovereignty or autonomy, and to what extent is Hegelian reason at all similar to Kant's? If Hegel surrenders reason's sovereignty, how is he able to argue (with Kant) that it is the faculty by virtue of which we may be said to enjoy the capacity for freedom? In short, how can Hegelian reason at once be historical and free?

Needless to say, these questions cannot be answered without carefully specifying the nature and conditions of Hegelian freedom. I argue that Hegel does not endorse Kant's assumption that reason can be wholly 'pure' such that it can transcend the realm of nature. This implies that he must also reject the associated Kantian conception of freedom as a capacity to initiate a causal series from a standpoint outside time. Does it then follow that Hegelian freedom is 'only nature', after all? Does the kind of historicized reason I attribute to Hegel require us to wholly deny the autonomy of reason as a source of normative authority?

As I understand him, Hegel does not believe that it does. I argue in Chapter 5 that Hegel holds that nature awards us special faculties or powers, including the power that uniquely distinguishes us from other beings and is responsible for our freedom. This unique power is our capacity for thought or abstraction. Hegel rejects the thesis of the givenness of freedom in so far as it is taken to imply that we come into existence with a ready-made set of concepts and laws, concepts and laws that require certain conditions merely for their activation and expression. On my reading, Hegel proposes instead that our given capacity for freedom *acquires* a determinate content; it does so in the course of its development. Various factors are responsible for that development, factors that include our choices as well as contingencies beyond our control. Our fate or freedom, for Hegel, is therefore to some extent shaped by those contingencies. But it does

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not follow from the fact that our freedom is shaped in this way, that we lack the ability to abstract and reflect, and to therefore freely determine our fate.

In one remark, Bourke characterizes my interpretation as follows:

> For Hegel, reason is not *dependent* on the material it processes. It remains free to hypothesize, conjecture and theorize, without being tethered to 'the given'. However, it is equally true that its speculative activity can be contradicted by experience.

In a certain respect, however, I *do* suggest that Hegelian reason is tethered to the 'given' and therefore dependent on the material it processes. It is true that Hegelian reason is not *just* nature. Nature endows us with a capacity of self-determination (for a certain spontaneous legislation, to borrow Kant's terminology). But for Hegel, this feature of reason is compatible with its partially receptive nature. As Bourke expresses the point in another passage, the 'logic of the concept' is for Hegel 'self-determining even as it is empirically responsive'. Hegelian reason generates content in the form of concepts and laws. New content emerges not spontaneously, however, but in response to conflict. Conflict in turn arises because our reason must cope with various factors and forces, including those over which it has no control.

My proposal that Hegel rejects the thesis that human reason comes equipped with a ready-made set of concepts and laws is admittedly controversial. One might reasonably ask whether the thesis is meant to cover even our most fundamental and stable concepts and laws, such as those the Kantian would identify as a priori categories and principles. Am I really representing Hegel as holding that even these most basic concepts and laws arise in response to reason's engagement with actual experience? I return to this important question in my response to Terry Pinkard's paper.

I conclude my response to Bourke by underscoring one important implication of the picture of Hegel I defend, one that Bourke well appreciates. Bourke reminds us that Burckhardt takes Hegel's commitment to the rationality of world history to imply that the historical process takes the form of an 'inevitable march of world spirit'. As Bourke points out, I derive inspiration from Emil Fackenheim and others in defending the very different thesis that Hegel discovers nothing inevitable about the course of human history.

My representation of reason's historical nature has the implication, then, that on Hegel's account human history could have taken a different course. As Bourke puts it, I aim to 'reconcile Hegel's commitment to rationalism with his professed ambition to accommodate the place of contingency in history'. This requires me to explain Hegel's frequent insistence upon the 'necessity' of history's course. I do so, in Chapter 3, by specifying three respects in which he attributes necessity to human history: First, history is necessary in that it is a story

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of events that are essential rather than trivial, events that reveal, in his words, not the 'prosperity or misfortune of this or that single man', but the journey of human freedom or Spirit. Second, the course of world history is necessary in so far as it describes only those connections the philosopher of history can defend as united by an overarching principle or purpose, one that adequately explains how past circumstances and events led to the reality of the present. Finally, the story is necessary if the historian can rationally demonstrate that its overarching law or principle is valid and therefore genuinely scientific. In short, I argue that Hegel gives us good textual grounds for reading his commitment to the necessity of history's course as implying something other than a thesis of pre-determination.

Terry Pinkard begins by accurately characterizing my central interpretative thesis, namely that 'we should see Hegel as fundamentally a philosopher of finitude, a proponent of the contingency and historical situatedness of all of our thoughts'. As Pinkard points out, this thesis that 'all thought must always be indexed to its own social, political and cultural time', implies that Hegel's 'a priori' is relativized and revisable. My reading of Hegel, he writes, is therefore 'Quinean' in certain respects:

> The picture that emerges here […] is something vaguely akin to Quine's 'web of belief' in which all propositions are in principle revisable but those that have the appearance of unrevisability ('a priori') are merely those that are more entrenched in our systems of beliefs and theories—closer to the centre of the web and thus harder to move.

Pinkard is right, too, that this interpretation looks implausible on its face if only because Hegel sometimes seems committed to the view that his own philosophical method as well as certain concepts and laws are a priori in the standard sense. In addition, Hegel frequently designates as 'necessary' key conceptual connections or transitions, whether in the context of his *Science of Logic* or his *Lectures on World History*. If my Quinean reading of Hegel is correct, how can we explain his frequent references to the 'necessity' of such connections? Pinkard is furthermore right to observe that I take on the task of defending a view of Hegel's 'philosophical' approach to world history as a kind of 'hybrid' between empirical and a priori methods.

> Sedgwick notes that Hegel's concept of philosophic history seems at first as if it contains a deep, self-undermining contradiction. On the one hand, Hegel stresses that 'we must be sure to take history as it is; in other words, we must proceed historically and empirically'. Yet on the other hand, he also clearly claims that in some sense his 'philosophic history' is a

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> priori. If the empirical and the a priori are mutually exclusive of each other, then Hegel seems to be in trouble.

In responding to Pinkard, I first want to consider questions he raises about how we should understand Hegel's remarks about necessity. As Pinkard points out, Hegel sometimes writes of the 'conceptual necessity' that binds key stages or moments of world history. Pinkard wonders how my treatment of Hegel's philosophy of world history could possibly capture Hegel's intentions, especially since I attribute to Hegel the view that world history could have unfolded differently. Pinkard asks:

> If everything could have gone much differently, then in what sense is there in history any kind of *conceptual* necessity—especially since [on Sedgwick's reading] all of our concepts themselves are deeply contingent?

Pinkard suggests that the kind of necessity I describe may be better described as 'aesthetic' necessity:

> It seems at first more like a kind of aesthetic necessity, somewhat in the way that people sometimes claim that the end of a successful novel or play shows that although it might have seemed in the course of the novel that things could go a lot of different ways, the ending suddenly discloses 'this is the way things had to be'.

It is true that I defend the controversial claim (as noted already in my response to Bourke) that, for Hegel, world history could have taken a different course. Precisely because Hegel is a 'philosopher of finitude' and therefore recognizes the role contingency plays in determining the course of world history, he is on my account committed to the assumption that Spirit's journey could have unfolded differently. As Pinkard points out, I suggest that this thesis is however compatible with the Hegelian assumption that there is necessary connection among the stages that constitute the progress of world history. On my reading of Hegel, the historian or philosopher of history can at any point in time look back and construct a narrative explaining how history arrived at where it is. From her vantage point and with the help of factual evidence, she can weave together a story about why it took the course that it in fact did; she can identify necessary moments in its path. She can, in other words, construct an explanatory story—instead of being forced to conclude that the sequence of happenings was merely accidental or random. Perhaps this is what Pinkard has in mind by 'aesthetic' necessity.

Pinkard assumes the position of devil's advocate, however, and wonders whether this could really be all Hegel intends by 'conceptual necessity'. After all,

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Hegel occasionally conveys the impression that he is committed to a thesis of pre-determination according to which world history could have only developed precisely in the way that it has in fact developed. The progressive stages he identifies in his story of the unfolding of human freedom, had to show up when and how they did. The course or plan of world history has been set from the start, and the concept 'freedom', on this account, has a pre-given content.

As Pinkard notes, Hegel's writings sometimes appear to support the thesis that this is the conception of necessity (and of an immutable and pre-determined 'a priori') to which he adheres. Pinkard quotes a passage in which Hegel writes that before Kepler 'could discover his immortal laws from the empirical data at his disposal', he needed to rely on 'a priori knowledge of ellipses, cubes, and squares and of the ideas concerning their relations'. On my ('Quinean') reading, Pinkard writes, these relations count for Hegel as 'laws' (even as a priori laws) only because they are 'well entrenched'. Our sciences depend on taking them as 'basically immovable but not as in principle immune to revision'. Pinkard then points out, however, that Hegel's reference to Kepler's 'a priori knowledge' in the above passage does not necessarily make trouble for my 'entrenchment' reading. He reminds us that Hegel often signals that his 'a priori' is not strict or standard, but rather a 'so to speak' or 'so-called' a priori.

Although Pinkard and I agree that Hegel is out to challenge 'the strict and inviolable opposition Kant establishes between the a priori and the posteriori', Pinkard highlights some of the challenges for my Quinean 'entrenchment' reading. He wonders whether it might be more accurate to interpret Hegel as most concerned to oppose a Kantian 'imposition' account. As Pinkard puts it, Hegel does not reject the 'idea of the a priori itself', but rather 'the Kantian conception of the a priori as something we "impose" on experience'.

Hegel undeniably aims to challenge aspects of the Kantian imposition view. Nonetheless, I worry that the alternative reading of Hegel that Pinkard proposes here is itself, in the end, too Kantian. I am persuaded that Hegel *does* reject the (standard) 'idea of the a priori itself' and departs from Kant in this respect.

Pinkard asks us to consider the following alternative reading:

> The meaning of thick terms [such as freedom, objectivity, reality] are grasped in terms of their use, but their use never exhausts the meaning of the terms themselves; or, in Hegel's own way of putting that point within his own more expansive systematic terms: 'The *shape* which the concept assumes in its actualization, and which is essential for cognition of the *concept* itself, is different from its *form* of being purely as concept, and is the other essential moment of the Idea'.

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Take, for example, the 'thick' concept of freedom. Pinkard implies that, for Hegel, the 'shape' of this concept can change over time. When used or applied, the concept in other words manifests or expresses itself in different ways. The concept's underlying 'form', however, does *not* change. In Pinkard's words, the 'specific use of the concept helps to reshape and deepen our understanding of an a priori concept as it is actualized'. The interpretation Pinkard presents in the above passage seems to be roughly this: We bring to our inquiries a priori concepts. What happens when we actually use or actualize such concepts, is that we deepen our *understanding* of them. In the process, what is 'reshaped' are not the concepts themselves but simply our grasp of them.

I wonder whether this can be all Hegel is saying. In two respects, this reading strikes me as too Kantian. Note, first, that the proposal that all that is reshaped over time is our understanding of our concepts is fully compatible with the assumption that we have some concepts that come with a pre-given content. Think of Kant's reference at the end of Section I of the *Groundwork* to the inborn moral compass with which we come into the world. We know the moral law (the categorical imperative) just as the slave boy in Plato's *Meno* knows fundamental laws of geometry. The knowledge is inborn but needs to be activated or brought to consciousness with the help of experience and education. If this is how we should read Hegel, then it would appear that he must likewise be committed to the premise that we are in the possession of fundamental categories that are a priori in the Kantian sense: they in no respect depend for their origin or meaning on experience. Moreover, even if we go along with the suggestion that what is 'reshaped' when we use such concepts is not the concepts themselves but rather our understanding of them, how does this reading necessarily avoid the Kantian imposition model? One can after all consistently assert both that (i) we have some concepts whose 'form' never changes, and (ii) we impose those concepts onto objects of thought or experience (for example, as necessary conditions of thought or experience).

Pinkard is surely right to emphasize that Hegel understands the history of human consciousness as a progressive series of distinct self-understandings. I would add to this, however, that there is for Hegel progress not just in the self-awareness of consciousness but also in its concepts (and even more radically, in the objects themselves). This thesis is of course most difficult to defend in the case of concepts that appear highly stable (or 'thick', as Pinkard calls them)—concepts such as 'subject', 'object', 'freedom' and 'necessity'. Deep down, concepts such as these would seem to admit no change over time at all.

Pinkard's subtle discussion of my book exposes some of its most vulnerable claims, the claims that are the most difficult to articulate as well as defend. I argue that one respect in which Hegel is not a Kantian is tied to the fact that he asks us to reconsider the standard a priori/a posteriori distinction (or the

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distinction between what is 'rational' and what is 'actual'). Pinkard notes that I prepared the ground for this interpretation in my book, *Hegel's Critique of Kant*, where I represented Hegel as arguing that there are for us no intuitions that are not conceptually mediated and no concepts that are wholly a priori or pure. In *Time and History*, I likewise suggest that Hegel is committed to a kind of hybrid account, and that this commitment shows up everywhere in his mature system, including in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.

Pinkard quotes me as follows:

> [Sedgwick's] summary judgment is thus: 'rational norms on [Hegel's] account are somehow *both* a priori and temporally or historically conditioned. Just as his "philosophic" history is a hybrid of a priori and empirical methods, so are rational norms in his view at once a priori and temporally conditioned'.

It does not escape Pinkard's attention that what most needs filling out in the above passage is my 'somehow'. On my version of the 'entrenchment' thesis, there is supposed to be an 'interdependence among distinct things' (between concepts and intuitions, the a priori and the empirical, the rational and the actual). Pinkard writes that the interdependence cannot be a mere 'hybrid' in the sense that we achieve 'unity' simply by conjoining two sides of an opposition (whether between actual and rational, a priori and empirical, concept and intuition). I certainly agree that Hegel is not just urging us to recognize, for example, that concepts and intuitions must combine forces in making experience possible. Were Hegel urging only this, his view would be in this crucial respect indistinguishable from Kant's. Hegel's 'entrenchment' or 'interdependence' thesis must therefore amount to something else.

Pinkard wonders whether I have misunderstood Hegel's hybrid view, and he suggests that my mistake shows up in the way in which I distinguish 'original' from 'reflective' history. On my account, as he puts it, 'original histories suppose they possess a conceptually unmediated access to the empirical facts whereas reflective histories think that their reflections can proceed without attention to the empirical facts'. This way of capturing Hegel's distinction between original and reflective cannot be right, Pinkard claims, because for Hegel original historians 'are those who write histories about their own times, not historians who think they deal with conceptually unmediated facts'.

It is true that Hegel characterizes the original historian as primarily concerned with the present, and the reflective historian as primarily concerned with the past. I do not deny this—in fact, I draw attention to it (see *TH*: 48–51). But I believe Hegel discovers a further important way of distinguishing the two methods. I argue that he characterizes the original historian as naïve because this approach to history insufficiently appreciates the extent to which assembling the

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empirical data requires conceptual mediation. Indeed, the fact that the original historian focuses on the present *encourages* this kind of naïveté. If what the historian is most concerned to describe is not the past but the present, she may be tempted to fool herself that her object is directly accessible. Precisely because the reflective historian focuses on the past, in contrast, this kind of naïveté is more difficult to sustain. As Pinkard himself writes, 'reflective historians write about the past, not the present, and since they are not part of that past, they have to reflect on what life was like at that time in an attempt to get at what is so extraordinarily hard to get at'. Moreover, it does not seem to me far-fetched to suggest that the way in which Hegel distinguishes these two methods in his introduction to the *Lectures* mirrors his more general criticisms of naïve empiricism and of an equally naïve or excessive rationalism (with its commitment to a priority in the standard sense). Hegel expresses these criticisms repeatedly and in virtually all of his works. (For some particularly accessible examples, see his discussions of 'Empiricism' and the 'Critical Philosophy' in §§37–78 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.)

I agree with Pinkard that Hegel's 'philosophic' method cannot be a 'hybrid' of the other two methods if this means that his own method simply combines all features of the other two. Hegel poses the question: how can a historical method both insist upon the necessity of accurately capturing the empirical evidence and at the same time claim to be a priori, such that the connections it reveals count as necessary rather than merely connections? I argue that Hegel's 'philosophic' historical method is accurately described as hybrid because he values as well as rejects some aspects of each of the other two (just as his overall philosophical approach values as well as rejects some aspects of classical empiricism and rationalism). The key to my interpretation is the 'entrenchment' view that Pinkard describes. There is a commitment to a priority, but it is a non-standard a priori in that these concepts and principles are in principle revisable. My greatest challenge in the book is to specify the implications Hegel associates with this thesis.

I address this challenge in my final chapter. There, I argue that the Hegelian commitment to the temporality and impermanence of all our concepts is compatible with his commitment to some kind of permanence. Pinkard captures my intentions correctly, then, when he writes in the passage already quoted, that:

> [t]he picture that emerges here […] is something vaguely akin to Quine's 'web of belief' in which all propositions are in principle revisable but those that have the appearance of unrevisability ('a priori') are merely those that are more entrenched in our systems of beliefs and theories—closer to the centre of the web and thus harder to move.

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As Pinkard suggests, the concepts and laws Hegel identifies as a priori are not 'purely' or 'absolutely' a priori, but merely well-entrenched. Although I read Hegel as, in Pinkard's words, a 'proponent of the contingency and historical situatedness of all of our thoughts', I grant that his system awards a role for permanence. At the very least, Hegel holds that permanence or identity is a necessary condition of intelligibility. Despite his criticisms of how philosophers throughout history have interpreted the law of identity, he does seem committed to the thesis that we cannot identify any particular meaning, X, as undergoing conceptual change, did we not presuppose that X=X.

Of course, if this is really Hegel's view—if he really does concede that at the basis of thought there is an absolutely fixed deep grammar or logic, governed by the law of identity among other fundamental laws—then we again have the problem of showing how his a priori is really any different from, for example, Kant's. It will not do to answer this challenge by citing passages in which Hegel calls our attention to changes over time in the meanings we have assigned to basic concepts such as 'substance', 'freedom', and even 'identity'. This strategy will not succeed for the reason I just mentioned, namely that we can only identify conceptual change against a backdrop of fixed meaning. To attribute to Hegel the view that there is temporality or flux 'all the way down', we would need to show that he aims to challenge the most basic conditions of intelligibility and laws of thought.

Must we conclude, then, that Hegel is in this crucial respect a Kantian after all? I still struggle to answer this question adequately. But one reason for thinking that the answer must be 'no' is Hegel's naturalism. As I understand him, Hegel agrees with Kant that there are basic conditions or forms without which thought and experience would not be possible for us. As necessary and universal conditions, these qualify as at least in some sense a priori. Just as there are steadfast rules that define what counts as a game of Scrabble, so there are steadfast rules or conditions governing what counts as thought or experience. Although there may be contingency in our choices about whether or not to play Scrabble, we cannot likewise opt in and out of the games of thought or experience. The conditions governing these latter activities go deeper; they govern our participation in games that are far more fundamental or necessary to who we are.

Hegel seems to grant all this and to therefore at least appear to follow in Kant's footsteps. But the matter is more complicated than this. In his anthropological works, he offers us his account of how we humans have emerged from 'lower' animal forms, and he seems to want to extract from this story a non-Kantian conclusion. In common with Kant, Hegel describes how nature endowed us with special cognitive powers with which we have developed capacities unavailable to other animals, such as the capacities to abstract and reflect. He explains how our power for thought and therefore also freedom have emerged

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out of nature. But in contrast to Kant, Hegel insists that there is nothing about human nature that is divine or rational in the sense of other-worldly or transcendent. All our capacities, including those for language and freedom, are capacities we have as creatures of nature. And nothing in nature escapes the forces of generation and corruption.

What I am proposing is that it is Hegel's naturalism, that is, his aversion to supporting any of his arguments with appeals to something outside nature, that most clearly distinguishes his position from that of the standard rationalist such as Kant. We are creatures that engage in the activities of thought and experience, activities that have been formed over millennia. Our nature is an evolving nature, and this is true even in the case of those changes in our nature that can be detected only if we take a very long view of things.

As I argue in the book, Kant's frequent appeals beyond nature provide necessary support for many of his central doctrines. His claim that we can have no knowledge of 'things in themselves' rests on his presupposition that we can transcend nature at least in thought. The same is true for his proposal that moral perfection is possible for us only in a world beyond or after this one. Hegel has no patience for either of these doctrines. Even 'ultimate' reality is knowable, in his view, and what is 'rational' can indeed be 'actual'. One of my central tasks in the book is to explain the connection between Hegel's desire to avoid these and other Kantian 'limitation' doctrines, and his project of trading a Kantian two-world ontology (or perspective) for a monistic, this-worldly one.

Pinkard concludes his reflections on my book by posing the hard questions: 'How deep does the "historicity" thesis thus go?' Where is the historicity or temporality in Hegel's frequent references to 'the "infinite freedom" of pure thought'? My proposal is that the thesis goes deep indeed, in some of the ways I have just sketched. Pinkard makes the intriguing final suggestion that we should perhaps understand the Hegelian 'Absolute' to refer to the 'formal *activity* of positing and dissolving itself and comprehending what that means—the Absolute is just initially the otherwise anarchic core of all thinking itself'. My interpretation of Hegel can accommodate this suggestion, especially with the help of the additional Hegelian assumption that thinking is an ongoing process, one that is by nature 'fluid' or 'plastic' and therefore never at rest. As Hegel puts it in 33 of the *Phenomenology*, it is by means of the activity of thinking that 'dead' 'thoughts [*Gedanken*]' are transformed into what they more truly are, namely 'concepts [*Begriffe*]', or 'spiritual essentialities [*geistige Wesenheiten*]'.

Chiel van den Akker discovers two main weaknesses in my treatment of Hegel's philosophy of history: First, he charges that my treatment contains too little history. Second, he challenges my account of Hegel's distinction between the 'original' and 'reflective' methods. These criticisms are for the most part directed at Chapter 2 of my book.

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Let me first address the charge that there is too little history in my treatment of Hegel's philosophy of history. Van den Akker writes that he 'would […] have liked to have read more about the contents of Hegel's philosophic history and about the context in which he developed it'. He correctly observes that, although I extensively discuss the introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, I say little about 'the more expansive parts of these lectures on the four worlds—the Oriental, Greek, Roman, and Germanic worlds—: the parts in which Hegel discusses historically locatable institutions and temporally located thinkers and agents'. Van den Akker complains that the 'thinness' of my overall treatment plagues my discussion of specific issues. Although I argue, for instance, that human freedom for Hegel acquires a determinate content over time, I do not in van den Akker's words 'specify the sort of determinate content that our capacity for freedom acquires, nor what makes it typically modern'. Although I argue that Hegel treats freedom as an 'achievement', I do not spell out what, exactly, is achieved. I say too little about the precise nature of the development, and about the specific features Hegel associates with modern freedom. I therefore give readers no significant understanding of how the specifically modern idea of freedom gives history its necessity. Likewise, my discussion of the role of the idea of purpose in Hegel's philosophy of history mentions but does not expand on his debt to Aristotle. Finally, since Hegel is 'after all […] a temporally located thinker responding to actions and events in his world', I should have paid more attention to the concrete historical conditions of his own philosophizing. It might have been illuminating, for example, to consider the French Revolution's impact on Hegel. Because my treatment is 'thin' with regard both to the 'contents of Hegel's philosophic history' and the 'context in which he developed it', I 'missed opportunities' that would have furthered my own aims.

In response, I grant that my discussion is not rich in historical detail. But is my treatment really as thin as van den Akker claims it is? He correctly notes that Hegel is persuaded that something important happens in the journey of consciousness from the 'states in the Oriental world to those in the modern Germanic world'. What emerges is a new form of subjectivity, one that appreciates its own capacity for stepping back and reflecting on its world, and that is aware of itself as capable of authoring and giving itself law.

Van den Akker does not mention my efforts in Chapter 4 to specify essential features of Hegel's unique conception of freedom (and its associated account of the providence or plan of history). I do so by comparing Hegel's conception with the two main alternatives he rejects, namely with what I refer to as the 'ancient' and the 'modern' conceptions. Although Hegel admires how the ancients enjoy a pre-reflective harmony between 'is' and 'ought', he charges that this harmony pays the price of a submerged and underdeveloped subjectivity—one that is not yet aware of itself as the source of normative authority. Although

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the 'modern' conception he admires acknowledges the sovereignty of subjectivity, this is a subjectivity that in his view overestimates its difference from or opposition to the social whole out of which it arises. Kantian versions of this modern freedom for example assert the power of subjectivity to transcend its actual world. Here and in Chapter 5, I explain the respect in which Hegel presents his own account of Spirit or freedom as an alternative to each of these two earlier perspectives. The specific form of freedom Hegel discovers to be actual in his own time is a freedom that is capable of giving itself existence and of thereby bridging the gap between 'ought' and 'is'. At the same time, it is a freedom that, although transformative and self-conscious, is not transcendent.

Van den Akker furthermore comments that the 'thinness' of my treatment undercuts my own objectives:

> The contents of Hegel's philosophic history remain undiscussed in Sedgwick's book, even though it is what the book is said to be concerned with. Sedgwick is solely interested in some of the philosophical ideas underlying it.

Notice that van den Akker writes here that my book is supposed to be concerned with the 'contents of Hegel's philosophy of history'. He then remarks, more accurately, that I am 'solely interested in some of the philosophical ideas underlying' Hegel's philosophy of history. As I state in my introduction, my aim is indeed more philosophical than historical. I seek answers to questions such as: What is the nature of Hegelian reason? What is its debt to history, and to forces not under its control and that are in this respect contingent? How do reason's laws and concepts come to be? My first chapter lays out the philosophical context motivating Hegel's concern with these questions. As I make clear, I am most interested to draw out how Hegelian reason departs from its Kantian counterpart. My task is to argue that Hegel is neither a reductive naturalist or historicist nor an orthodox Kantian. For Hegel but not for Kant, we can know the plan or providence of world history. Moreover, for Hegel but not for Kant, the rational (the 'ought') can be realized in what 'is'. Although I argue that Hegelian freedom is not reductively naturalist, I also set out to show that Hegel goes beyond Kant in assigning a certain temporality to reason. My discussion depends heavily on putting Hegel's ideas in *philosophical* context. I certainly recognize the value of projects that provide a fuller picture of the actual historical conditions of Hegel's own philosophizing.[2] But as van den Akker acknowledges, my aims in this book are more narrowly philosophical.

Van den Akker's second major objection concerns my representation of Hegel's distinction between original and reflective history. In his §V, he challenges my remark that Hegel reads original history as 'largely descriptive'. He formulates his complaint as follows:

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> Hegel does not want to suggest, as Sedgwick erroneously believes, that the original historian 'simply reports what she sees' (*TH*: 58) and that her work is 'an exercise in purely passive observation' (*TH*: 66).

Van den Akker in other words asserts that it is wrong to imply, as he says I do, that the original historian fails to reflect. Van den Akker suggests, in addition, that I present Hegel as wholly rejecting the contributions of original history. He reminds us that Hegel much admires Thucydides even though he classifies him among those engaged in original history. In van den Akker's words, Hegel

> calls Thucydides's history an 'immortal work' and an 'absolute win' of the war between Athens and Sparta (*PH*: –/325). How would he call it that if it were a mere 'exercise in purely passive observation'?

Surely, however, Hegel can both admire Thucydides and at the same time find something deficient in his approach. Moreover, I do not claim that Hegel describes the original historian as *in fact* engaging in purely passive observation. What I say is that Hegel represents the original historian as *aiming* to be purely descriptive (as aiming to accurately describe the present) (*TH*: 2.1.1.). As I interpret him, Hegel criticizes the original historian for failing to sufficiently appreciate the role reflection plays in historical investigation.

Van den Akker furthermore remarks that it is 'misleading' of me to suggest that original histories are for Hegel 'autobiographical'. They are not autobiographical, according to van den Akker, because 'the works of original historians are not concerned with the lives their authors have been leading'. What I actually write, however, is that original history may be described as *in a certain respect* autobiographical. I put the point as follows:

> The original historian [according to Hegel] represents her 'own culture' rather than that of a 'borrowed consciousness [*geliehenes Bewußtsein*]' […] Original history, on Hegel's portrayal, may thus be characterized as in this respect *autobiographical*. Since the object of the original historian's focus is her own culture, she in effect tells her own story, or more precisely, the story of her own time.

Van den Akker voices complaints, too, about how I characterize Hegel's account of critical reflective history. In his words, I am mistaken to suggest that critical reflective history is for Hegel best characterized as 'coming up with a priori fabrications, dismissing distinguishing facts from fiction'. After all, claims van den

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Akker, Hegel's colleagues in the history department of the University of Berlin were preoccupied with 'distinguishing between fact and fabrication'.

Van den Akker is correct to point out that I emphasize Hegel's worry about the tendency of critical reflective history to be excessively subjective and to defend 'a priori fabrications'. Van den Akker charges, however, that I misidentify 'the reflective historians Hegel has in mind'. In my defence, I do not try to offer a comprehensive review of Hegel's numerous complaints about those he classifies as reflective historians. My objective is instead to draw attention to what makes this method in general 'reflective' as opposed to 'original', in his view. But van den Akker is undoubtedly right that more could be said about the various objections that Hegel directs at different reflective historians.

More importantly, van den Akker expresses doubts about the overall lesson I derive from Hegel's discussion of the original and reflective methods:

> I […] do not think that associating original history with empirical accuracy, reflective history with subject interpretive narration, and presenting philosophic history as some sort of combination of both (*TH*: 63) captures what is at stake in Hegel's distinction.

In fact, however, Hegel unambiguously presents his own 'philosophic' method as combining features of the other two. A main objective of my Chapter 2 is to draw parallels between Hegel's rejection of the methods of original and reflective history and his more general critique of both naïve empiricism and an excessive subjectivism. Just as it is accurate to represent Hegel's mature system as a hybrid between certain forms of empiricism and certain forms of rationalism, it is equally accurate to represent him as working out a philosophical method of history that is to some extent a hybrid between the original and reflective approaches. In the early paragraphs of my Chapter 2, I emphasize in addition that the methods Hegel sketches in his introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* are ideal types. He nowhere claims that the boundaries between the three methods are razor sharp or that the three methods are perfectly separable. Van den Akker seems unimpressed by the fact that the three historical methods Hegel outlines in this discussion mirror approaches to objectivity that he lays out in his *Encyclopaedia Logic* and elsewhere. I remain convinced, however, that if we ignore this parallel, we miss the deep philosophical import of the Introduction.

Van den Akker would have us accept that Hegel's main purpose in laying out the three methods is to compare his 'philosophic history' with 'histories written by historians'. Only philosophic history, van den Akker writes, 'has to do with "the progress [*Fortschritt*] in the consciousness of freedom" (*PH*: 22/32)'. Although I agree that Hegel holds that only the philosophic method successfully narrates progress [*Fortschritt*] in the consciousness of freedom, I believe there is

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more to Hegel's discussion of the three methods than van den Akker implies. It is surely significant that Hegel alerts us to the fact that his 'philosophic' approach to history appears to contain a 'contradiction'. He tells us that his method shares with reflective history the aim of construing history reflectively, that is, through the medium of thought. He then concedes that a history is 'truer' if it 'confines itself to what is given'. Hegel therefore sets himself the challenge of defending a method that avoids original history's naïve claim to descriptive accuracy but without compromising the principal goal of history which is to represent the facts. He sets himself this challenge in order to prepare us to understand what is unique about his 'philosophic' method. In contrast to van den Akker, I remain convinced that this is the main purpose and philosophical interest of Hegel's discussion of the three methods.

In common with van den Akker, Raphaël Authier confines his attention for the most part to my Chapter 2. He wonders, first, whether I have correctly grasped Hegel's characterization of the philosophical nature of his historical method. He rightly points out that my interpretation relies heavily on Hegel's classification of the three methods (original, reflective and philosophical) in the introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Authier reminds us, however, that this classification disappears after the first *Lectures* of 1822–23. In the later lectures, he tells us, 'Hegel ceased to explain the subject of the philosophy of world history by reference to the three kinds of historical writing'. The fact that the classification disappears in the later lectures is significant, Authier claims, because

> in the lecture course of 1822–1823, Hegel defined the subject of the lectures on the philosophy of world history by reference to forms of historical narratives. It was his reflection on the work of historians that enabled him to define what his lectures were about.

According to Authier, then, Hegel's 'reflection on the work of historians' played a role in the earlier lectures that it did not in the later editions. In the earlier lectures, Authier writes, Hegel placed 'himself on the same ground as historians'. If I have understood him correctly, Authier implies by this that in the earlier lectures, Hegel thought of himself as recording historical events after the fashion of a standard historian. In the later versions, Authier implies, Hegel made it increasingly clear that we ought not to confuse his philosophy of history with positive history.

Perhaps I have misunderstood Authier's reasoning here, but why should the fact that Hegel discusses the three methods in 1822–23 be taken as evidence in favour of the conclusion his approach was then more positivistic than in the later lectures (in which he gives us no explicit discussion of the three methods)?

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Although it is true that some of the methodological remarks of 1822–23 are absent from later editions, a discussion of methodology is not itself an exercise in positive history.[3] As I noted in my response to van den Akker, Hegel introduces the three methods in order to give us clues to what will be new and different about his own 'philosophical' method. Already in the early lectures, he makes it clear that his philosophical method will be distinct from positive history. His insistence that his philosophical method will be different from that of 'original' history gives us one indication of his critical stance towards positive history, for the original historian's claim to be capable of accurately recording the facts rests on her failure to appreciate the extent to which her narrative is interpretative ('reflective'). Moreover, Hegel's criticisms of positivism of all forms (including the positivism of a naïve empiricism) are present even in his earliest writings (see, for example, the theological writings of 1802–03; see also the Sense-Certainty chapter in his *Phenomenology* of 1807). For at least these reasons, I am unpersuaded by Authier's suggestion that in 1822–23, Hegel remained 'uncertain' about the 'relationship of speculative philosophy to the positive sciences'.

Authier next makes the important observation that 'history' has different implications in different contexts for Hegel:

> [D]epending on whether Hegel is talking about the history of the objective spirit, the history of art, the history of religion or the history of philosophy, history does not have the same relationship to natural time.

On Authier's description, Hegelian natural time is defined in terms of 'succession and irreversibility', and natural time does not capture what Hegel has in mind by the temporality of divine history, or of the history of art and philosophy. If there is temporality at all in these latter cases, Authier asserts, it is a temporality in which 'some things last'. Not just in divine history but even in the history of philosophy, something endures; something 'exhibits a form of eternity', on Authier's reading of Hegel.

But Authier in addition insists that in Hegelian world history, we are dealing with what happens in chronological time, that is, with a mere temporal succession of stages. He contrasts Hegel's treatment of world history with his treatment of the histories of art, religion and philosophy. In these latter cases, Authier says, the 'object of philosophy is only indirectly chronological'. It is only 'indirectly' chronological, according to Authier, because these histories deal with the 'manifestation of the spirit' which shows up in time, 'but not in the form of an irreversible succession'. World history is for Hegel directly rather than indirectly chronological, Authier seems to imply, because Hegel discovers nothing enduring in world history.

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It puzzles me that Authier interprets Hegelian world history in this way. Hegel describes world history as the unfolding in time of something that endures, namely Spirit. Authier's interpretation is especially perplexing in light of the fact that he draws our attention to a passage in which Hegel explicitly describes world history as based on an (enduring) idea of reason:

> The philosophy of history […] is based on a 'single thought (*einzige Gedanke*)' (*GW* 18: 140): 'the simple idea of reason, that reason dominates the world, that things also have gone rationally in world history (*es also auch in der Weltgeschichte vernünftig zugegangen ist*)' (*GW* 18: 140).

Authier furthermore wonders whether I can be right to describe all of Hegel's texts as 'narratives'. He understands Hegel to reserve the word '*Erzählung*' (usually translated as 'narrative') for 'productions that fall under the category of representation: the works of historians, biblical narratives, myths, etc.'. A 'simple narrative cannot constitute a philosophical production in the strict sense of the term', Authier argues, 'because the "development" that Hegel sees as the constant object of philosophy (be it logic, nature or spirit) is not a simple succession of facts (whether real or fictional)'. If I have followed his reasoning, Authier's point is that since philosophy offers us more than a list of facts occurring in temporal succession, 'philosophical production' should not be classified as an instance of 'narrative [*Erzählung*]'.

Authier apparently assumes that Hegel never intends the term '*Erzählung*' to describe anything other than temporal succession. Authier defends this assumption with the help of the following passage from the *Science of Logic*:

> [P]hilosophy ought not to be a narrative of what happens [*die Philosophie soll keine Erzählung dessen sein, was geschieht*], but a cognition of what is true in what happens, in order further to comprehend on the basis of this truth what in the narrative appears as a mere happening.

As Authier explains, the stages of the *Science of Logic* 'are not linked to each other by relations of chronological anteriority and posteriority'; for this reason, they should not be described as a constituting a narrative. Authier claims that this is true of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* as well. Although 'all natural beings are temporal', the 'development of the concept throughout nature described in the *Encyclopaedia* is not temporal'. Authier goes so far as to remark that Hegel 'never speaks of *Erzählung* in relation to his own texts'.

Authier correctly reminds us that philosophy does not for Hegel reduce to a mere description of a succession of facts. But what about the suggestion that

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we are *never* justified in describing Hegel's representation of a development as an *Erzählung*? The following two passages from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* undercut this assumption:

> *History* [*Geschichte*] in our language unites the objective and subjective sides; it means both the *historiam rerum gestarum* and the *res gestas*. History is what happens no less than [*nicht minder wie*] it is the narration [*Erzählung*] of what happens. (*W* 12: 83; in *GW* 18: 192)[4]

> The periods we like to represent from centuries or millennia, and that elapsed prior to the writing of history [*Geschichtsschreiben*], […] are without objective history, because they exhibit no subjective, no telling or narrative of history [*Geschichtserzählung*]. (*W* 12: 84; in *GW* 18: 193f.)

As these two passages indicate, Hegel does not restrict his use of *Erzählung* to describe the mere temporal succession of happenings or occurrences in which nothing endures. The history (*Geschichte*) Hegel refers to in these passages includes both what happens and the narration (*Erzählung*) of what happens.

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Notes

[1] Abbreviations used:

GW = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968–).

PH = Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. L. Rauch (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett, 1988)/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in *W* 12 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001).

W = Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969–70).

TH = Sedgwick, *Time and History in Hegelian Thought and Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[2] Two of my critics have provided precisely this kind of context in outstanding monographs. See Bourke (2023) and Pinkard (2017).

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[3] Although Hegel does not explicitly distinguish the original, reflective and philosophic methods in the 1830–31 edition, he does discuss methodology. He indicates there that his 'philosophic" method faces the challenge of both attending to what is factual or given (*das Gegebene*) and unifying (*verbinden*) that given material in thoughts (*Gedanken*). See *GW* 18: 139.
[4] Note that this is the Meiner edition of the 1830–31 Introduction.

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