

HEGEL ON PHILOSOPHY AS THE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF THOUGHT: IMPLICATIONS FOR PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH IN VIETNAM TODAY

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ABSTRACT

The thesis “philosophy is the history of philosophy” by G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) is one of the core statements expressing the dialectical, idealist view of philosophy as a process of movement of the absolute spirit. For Hegel, philosophy is not only the contemplation of abstract truth, but also the self-awareness of the spirit in history, reflecting the dialectical development of reason. Each philosophical doctrine, therefore, is not an isolated viewpoint but an inevitable “link” in the self-movement of absolute thought. This article aims to deeply analyze the content, dialectical structure, and methodological significance of the above thesis, and, at the same time, to point out the limits of its idealism, thereby clarifying the inheritance and reform of philosophy carried out by Marx and Engels, and its further developments by V. I. Lenin. In addition, the article points out the influence of this thesis on modern philosophical thinking, especially in the study of history of thought and philosophy of history, and its implications for philosophical research in Vietnam today.

Keywords: Absolute Spirit; dialectics; historical consciousness; German idealism; contemporary Vietnamese philosophy

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LA FILOSOFÍA COMO AUTOCONCIENCIA DEL PENSAMIENTO EN HEGEL: IMPLICACIONES PARA LA INVESTIGACIÓN FILOSÓFICA EN VIETNAM HOY

RESUMEN

La tesis según la cual “la filosofía es la historia de la filosofía”, de G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), es una de las afirmaciones centrales que expresan la visión dialéctica idealista de la filosofía como un proceso de movimiento del espíritu absoluto. Para Hegel, la filosofía no es solo la contemplación de la verdad abstracta, sino también la autoconciencia del espíritu en la historia, reflejo del desarrollo dialéctico de la razón. Cada doctrina filosófica, por lo tanto, no es un punto de vista aislado, sino un “eslabón” inevitable en el automovimiento del pensamiento absoluto. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar en profundidad el contenido, la estructura dialéctica y la importancia metodológica de la tesis mencionada, y al mismo tiempo señalar los límites de su idealismo, aclarando así la herencia y la reforma de la filosofía llevadas a cabo por Marx y Engels, y sus desarrollos posteriores por V. I. Lenin. Además, el artículo destaca la influencia de esta tesis en el pensamiento filosófico moderno, especialmente en el estudio de la historia del pensamiento y la filosofía de la historia, así como sus implicaciones en la investigación filosófica en el Vietnam de hoy.

Palabras clave: espíritu absoluto; dialéctica; conciencia histórica, idealismo alemán; filosofía vietnamita contemporánea

1. Problem statement

1.1 THE CONTEXT OF THE BIRTH OF HEGEL'S THOUGHT

G.W. F. HEGEL WAS BORN IN 1770 IN STUTTGART (GERMANY), a time when German classical philosophy was reaching its peak with Kant and Fichte. He lived in a period when Europe was experiencing strong changes such as the French bourgeois revolution, the formation of the bourgeois rule of law state, and profound shifts in human perception of freedom, reason, and history. Inheriting Kant's critical spirit and Fichte's initiative, Hegel built a philosophical system with the ambition to cover all of reality, from nature, to society, and to spirit, in which all things are understood as the dialectical development of absolute reason. In his works *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* (1817) and *History of Philosophy* (1833-1836, published posthumously), Hegel stated the view that "philosophy is the self-consciousness of the spirit about itself in history" (Hegel, 1994a, p. 27). From here, he affirmed a famous thesis: "Philosophy is the history of philosophy, and the history of philosophy is philosophy" (Hegel, 1994, p. 15). This thesis expresses Hegel's "profound conception of the historicity of thought, and moreover, of the dialectical nature of philosophical truth" (Hirschberger, 2020, p. 490)*.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

BEFORE HEGEL, most philosophers viewed the history of philosophy as a "collection" of disjointed doctrines, or simply as a tool to illustrate metaphysical arguments.

* *Universitas Philosophica* regularly asks its authors to use the standard translations, into the language in which they are publishing, of the philosophical sources cited. If sources are cited in another language, the author must provide a translation into the language of the article and, for philological accuracy, include the original in a footnote. In the case of this particular article, in which part of the philosophical problem under examination is the reception of Hegelian thought in the Vietnamese national tradition, we have decided to retain the quotations exactly as submitted by the author—that is, most of the corpus of Hegel and Marx is translated into English from Vietnamese editions; the author also translates into English references listed in other languages, such as German and French; quotations from texts written in Vietnamese, translated into English by the author, do not include their transliterated transcription (Editor's Note).

Hegel was the first to realize that the true form of existence of philosophy is the successive development of philosophical systems. For him, philosophy cannot be separated from its own history, because the absolute spirit only reaches knowledge of itself through the historical process, that is, through the dialectical negation of previous concepts. Therefore, every philosopher from Heraclitus, to Plato, to Descartes, and to Kant is a stage in the self-development of spirit. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1994e), Hegel wrote: “The truth is not a finished product, but a process in which the absolute becomes itself” (p. 12). The thesis “philosophy is the history of philosophy” is therefore not only a statement of epistemological history, but also a methodological principle stating that, to understand philosophy, one must understand it in the dialectical movement of the history of human thought.

In Vietnam, Hegelian philosophy has been studied primarily through the framework of Marxist philosophy since the second half of the 20th century. Vietnamese scholars have devoted considerable attention to Hegel’s dialectics, his conception of the absolute spirit, and his influence on the formation of Marxist philosophy. Important contributions can be found in the works of Trần Đức Thảo, Nguyễn Hữu Vui, Nguyễn Tài Thư, and other scholars of German classical philosophy. However, most studies have focused on Hegel’s dialectical method and its relationship to Marxism, while comparatively less attention has been paid to his conception of philosophy itself, particularly the thesis that philosophy is the self-consciousness of the history of thought. As a result, there remains a gap in the Vietnamese literature regarding the philosophical and methodological significance of this thesis for contemporary philosophical research. In the context of increasing international integration and the growing need to renew philosophical methodology in Vietnam, a re-examination of Hegel’s understanding of philosophy may provide valuable theoretical insights. This article therefore seeks not only to clarify the meaning of Hegel’s conception of philosophy as the self-consciousness of thought, but also to explore its implications for philosophical research in Vietnam today.

1.3 RESEARCH SITUATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

HEGEL’S THOUGHTS ON THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY created a turning point in the perception of Western philosophy. From the 19th century to the

present, many scholars have approached and commented on this thesis from different perspectives. During their lifetime, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels considered this to be philosophy's "rational kernel behind the mystical shell" of Hegelian dialectics (Marx, 2005a, p. 35), and at the same time affirmed that the development of philosophical thought is closely linked to the development of social existence. Heidegger (1976) considered the history of philosophy according to Hegel as the history of the forgetting of being, that is, the history of a certain understanding of Western ontology. Alexandre Kojève (1947), a famous 20th-century interpreter of Hegel's work, stated that Hegel was the first person to "make history into philosophy, and philosophy into history" (p. 41). From this, it can be seen that the argument "philosophy is the history of philosophy" not only reflects an intrinsic characteristic of Hegel's philosophy, but also opens a new approach to philosophical science, considering the history of thought as a logical process of reason, where truth manifests and perfects itself.

2. Research methods

THE ARTICLE uses a combination of methods: first, it draws on dialectical materialism (inherited from Marx and Engels) to analyze the movement of Hegel's thought in the relationship between social existence and philosophical consciousness. It also makes use of the historical-logical method, aiming to reproduce the internal development of Hegel's thesis through the stages of Western philosophical thinking. Finally, by means of analyses, syntheses, and comparisons, it establishes contrasts between Hegel's ideas and those of modern, contemporary and post-Hegelian philosophers (Kant, Marx, Heidegger, Kojève).

3. Research results and discussion

3.1 THE NATURE AND CONTENT OF THE THESIS "PHILOSOPHY IS THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY"

ACCORDING TO HEGEL, philosophy is the self-awareness of the absolute spirit. In Hegel's philosophical system, all reality is understood as the process of self-development of absolute spirit. Absolute spirit, according to Hegel, is not a static entity but the self-conscious activity of reason, that is, reason reflecting

on itself through history. Therefore, philosophy, as the highest form of theoretical consciousness, is the self-awareness of absolute spirit about itself. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel asserts: “The absolute is spirit; it is reality only insofar as it knows itself; and this knowledge is philosophy” (Hegel, 1994e, p. 27). Therefore, philosophy cannot be separated from the process by which spirit knows itself, that is, the history of philosophical systems. Each philosopher, each doctrine is only a stage of spirit on its journey to self-knowledge. Therefore, philosophy is the history of philosophy because only in the history of philosophy does the absolute spirit manifest its reality. Thus, history is not the external context, but the very form of existence of philosophy.

For Hegel, each philosophical doctrine is a “link” of absolute thought. According to Hegel, philosophy does not exist as separate systems, but as a dialectical whole, in which each doctrine represents only one aspect, one stage of truth. He pointed out: “The successive philosophical systems are not accidental oppositions, but necessary moments in the development of truth” (Hegel, 1994a, p. 15). From Heraclitus to Kant, from Greek materialism to German idealist philosophy, each philosophical system represents an effort of reason to perceive the absolute. Although these doctrines contradict and negate each other, in Hegel’s dialectical logic, that negation is dialectical negation (*Aufhebung*), that is, a transcendence with inheritance. In other words, the new does not completely erase the old, but raises it to a higher level. Therefore, Hegel sees the history of philosophy as the history of the development of reason, as “thinking of thinking”, where the spirit deploys all of its own possibilities and internal contradictions to reach absolute freedom.

3.2 DIALECTICS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT IN HISTORY

DIALECTICS IS THE LAW OF MOTION OF THOUGHT, and, consequently, it is the core of Hegel’s philosophical system. According to him, all existence is a process of internal contradiction, and that contradiction is the driving force of development. Dialectics is not only a method of cognition, but also the logic of movement of reality itself. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel stated: “Contradiction is the source of all movement and vitality; it is the deepest principle of existence” (Hegel, 1980, p. 65).

Therefore, the history of philosophy also follows this dialectical law. Each philosophical doctrine is a “thesis” that puts forward a view on truth. The next doctrine appears as an “antithesis”, negating and overcoming the limitations of the previous premise. Accordingly, a new “synthesis” is born, unifying and surpassing the two previous stages, thus paving the way for a new cycle of thinking. That process reflects the movement of the absolute spirit in its effort to understand itself through history.

In this way, logic and history are unified in Hegel’s conception. The most prominent feature of Hegel’s philosophical thought is that he sees logic and history as two sides of the same process. By doing so, Hegel sought “to make very complex subjects comprehensible” (Forero, 2022, p. 71). In the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel (1991) wrote: “Logic is the inner form of history, and history is the realization of logic” (p. 33). This means that Logic expresses the necessary order of thought, the movement of concepts. History expresses the process of realization of that order in time and in human consciousness. Therefore, the history of philosophy is not just a random succession, but a sensible, concrete manifestation of dialectical logic. Philosophy in this sense is the abstraction, synthesis and self-consciousness of the history of human thought.

Consequently, the history of philosophy needs to be conceived of as a dialectical system. In order to do this, Hegel attempted to present the entire history of Western philosophy as a series of inevitable developments of reason, expressed through three major stages: Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modernity.

Antiquity is the period when the mind first begins to perceive the world as an object. Greek philosophy, as represented by thinkers such as Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle, is the “childhood of reason”, where thinking is still in harmony with nature.

In the Middle Ages, with Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, the spirit separated from the world and turned toward God; and by that movement philosophy became theology.

Finally, in Modern times, the spirit returns to itself, reaching self-consciousness through Descartes, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and finally Hegel, who sees himself as the one who synthesized all of the previous movements in a complete dialectical system.

Through these three stages, according to Hegel, the absolute spirit goes from harmony with nature, to alienation to self-regeneration, that is, from unconscious to self-conscious, thus reflecting the development of human reason.

3.3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE THESIS

THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY is not a collection but an organic whole. Before Hegel, the history of philosophy was often presented as a collection of disjointed ideas, lacking internal connections. Hegel was the first to demonstrate that there is a dialectical succession between philosophical doctrines, that the “new” can only arise from the negation and overcoming of the “old”. Thanks to that, he laid the foundation for the study of the history of philosophy as a science, with its own object, structure, and laws of development. To this day, this view still dominates the teaching of philosophy in most European universities, and Hegel has become a prominent figure in contemporary philosophy.

Also, thanks to this effort to systematize the history of philosophy, Hegel introduced the “historical-logical” principle in philosophical research. Indeed, an important contribution of Hegel’s thought is to affirm the unity between logic and history. According to him, when studying philosophy, it is necessary to go from history to logic and understand the development of thought through the periods, in order to grasp the nature of dialectical logic; and then, to go from logic to history and use dialectical logic to recreate the historical process in a conceptual form.¹

Consequently, philosophy can be characterized as the historical consciousness of mankind. According to Hegel, philosophy is the deepest consciousness that mankind has of itself. In the Preface to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, he wrote: “Philosophy is its own time captured in thought” (Hegel, 1991, p. 5). This means that philosophy does not go beyond the time in which it is born; on the contrary, it reflects and summarizes the entire spiritual, political, and cultural experience of a nation at a certain historical moment. Therefore,

1 This way of proceeding was inherited by Marx in *Capital*, where he applied the “method of going from the abstract to the concrete,” which is a form of concretization of Hegel’s principle in socio-economic research.

studying philosophy is also studying the historical consciousness of mankind, the way mankind understands itself through different forms of thinking.

3.4 *THE LIMITS OF IDEALISM AND THE INHERITANCE OF HEGELIAN PHILOSOPHY BY MARX AND ENGELS*

ALTHOUGH THE THESIS that “philosophy is the history of philosophy” has profound value, it remains within the system of absolute idealism (Chuan & Hop, 1998, p. 124). Hegel believed that absolute spirit develops by itself through the pure internal force of reason, while material reality and social life are only the external manifestation of spirit. Therefore, in his system, the real subject of history is spirit, not real human beings. Engels (2005a) criticized this point in “Dialectics of Nature”, where he wrote that Hegel had “turned his head upside down and his feet up in the sky” (p. 494), because, in his view, what is moving in the real world is not Spirit, but real human beings acting in history.

This is why Marx and Engels inherited Hegel’s “rational kernel”, that is, dialectics, but placed it on the foundation of historical materialism. According to them, the history of philosophy is not a spontaneous process of the spirit, but a reflection of the development of social existence and material production. Marx (2005c) asserted: “It is not consciousness that determines life, but social life that determines consciousness” (p. 38). Therefore, they came to the assertion that philosophy is also historical, but that history must be understood as a dialectical reflection of social practice in human thinking. Thanks to that, Marx and Engels liberated Hegel’s thesis from its idealistic shell, providing it with a materialistic and practical foundation.

After Hegel, many modern philosophical schools continued to develop or criticize his thesis. Typical among them is Heidegger (1976), who argued that Hegelian philosophy identified the “history of philosophy” with the “history of reason”, thereby unintentionally obscuring the “problem of being,” that is, existence as a mystery that cannot be purely rationalized. Alexandre Kojève (1947) considered Hegelian philosophy to be the completion of Western philosophy, because it brought history into ontology, that is, turned philosophy into the history of consciousness. Karl Jaspers and Sartre in the existentialist movement also recognized Hegel as the one who opened the problem of “human historicity”,

although they opposed the concept of absolute idealism. Thus, despite criticism, the thesis “philosophy is the history of philosophy” is still the fundamental inspiration for modern philosophy in understanding philosophy as a historical, cultural, and human phenomenon, and not just as pure logic. And it is so because all of these appropriations of Hegel’s thesis reveal that it made possible “to reconsider the ultimate goal of philosophy itself” (Cruz-Guerrero, 2025).

3.5 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL VALUES, AND IDEALISTIC LIMITATIONS OF THE THESIS “PHILOSOPHY IS THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY”

HEGEL’S THESIS that “philosophy is the history of philosophy” contains profound theoretical value, expressed in the fact that he dialecticized the concept of philosophy and historicized the process of the development of thought. Before Hegel, philosophy was often considered the realm of immutable, timeless truths. The history of philosophy was just a “story” about different, correct and wrong doctrines. But for Hegel, philosophy cannot stand outside of history, as history itself is the concrete form of existence of philosophy. This marked a turning point in philosophical epistemology: truth is no longer something fixed, but the result of a process of historical and dialectical development. In the *History of Philosophy*, Hegel (1994c) pointed out that “the history of philosophy is not just a succession of different viewpoints, but the inevitable development of reason, in which each philosophical system is a link in the entire process of self-awareness of the spirit” (p. 37). With this assertion, it is shown that Hegel went beyond the metaphysical concept of the history of thought, for he understood that each past philosophy is not “wrong” but “incomplete”; that is to say that the negation between philosophical systems is not an absolute negation, but a dialectical negation, meaning that the new contains and enhances the old. And so, the entire history of philosophy is the process of self-development of the absolute spirit, in which truth is expressed through successive stages. Thus, Hegel’s thesis helps to unify truth and history, logic and reality, the universal and the particular. This idea became the foundation for studying philosophy in a historical-developmental direction, rather than an abstract-unchanged one.

With regards to the methodological value of Hegel’s thesis, its greatest contribution lies in the method of cognition and philosophical research that it suggests.

First, Hegel laid the foundation for the historical-logical method in philosophy. According to him, the history of philosophy is the concrete form of existence of the logical movement of thought. Therefore, to understand philosophy, we cannot only analyze the logical content of the concept, but must place it in a specific historical movement chain—where the concept is formed, developed and negated. This provides to later philosophical science, especially Marxist-Leninist philosophy, a basic research method that must start from historical reality, analyze it in its movement and development, and recognize its internal logic.

Second, Hegel asserted that all philosophical thought is historical and temporal, therefore, researchers cannot consider any doctrine as absolute truth. This approach contributes to the formation of a critical spirit in philosophy, that is, the methodological demand of always placing each viewpoint in its historical context and conditions of origin.

Third, from this perspective, Hegel opens an approach that goes from the system to the whole. According to him, philosophy is not a discrete collection of ideas, but a whole with a unified internal structure, in which every concept and doctrine has a definite dialectical position. Therefore, the study of the history of philosophy is not just a study of texts, but a reproduction of the movement of reason in its totality.

Fourth, the thesis also has profound philosophical-educational value. It forces philosophy students not to stop at “memorizing theories”, but to perceive the laws of development of human thought. In other words, studying philosophy is learning how to think historically, learning how to understand the movement of the human spirit in history. Thus, “philosophy is the history of philosophy” is not only a theoretical statement, but a fundamental methodological principle, one that helps philosophy become a science of the very development of human thought.

However, along with recognizing the theoretical, methodological, and philosophical-educational value of Hegel’s thesis, it is also vital to note the limits of idealism in Hegel’s conception. Despite its great value, Hegel’s thesis still contains certain idealist historical limitations, stemming from his absolutely idealist philosophical system. These limits can be portrayed as follows:

First, Hegel considered absolute spirit (*der absolute Geist*) as the sole subject of history. According to him, human history, including the history of philosophy, is only the process of self-awareness of the spirit. Meanwhile, the material, economic, social, and political conditions that govern the development of thought are considered secondary, just “forms of expression” of the spirit. This understanding leads to the separation of thought from material reality. Philosophy, instead of reflecting social life, becomes the movement of pure ideas. This is the point that Marx harshly criticized in his “Theses on Feuerbach” from 1845, where he pointed out that the development of thought separated from reality is an illusion, because humans do not exist outside of specific social-historical relations: “in its reality, the human essence is the ensemble of social relations” (Marx, 2005d, p. 11).

Second, by absolutizing the role of reason, Hegel viewed the history of philosophy as a closed, inevitable, and complete process, that culminated in his own philosophical system. This is clearly shown in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* from 1817, when Hegel (1991) considered his philosophy to be “the final perfect form of the spirit” (p. 10). This view reduced the openness of history, because it implicitly assumed that human thought had reached its final destination, which was a self-satisfied idealist conception.

Third, Hegel identified the development of thought with the progress of absolute reason, without fully distinguishing between speculative reason and social practice.

Marx later pointed out that the history of ideas can only be properly understood in relation to the history of material production and class struggle. As Marx (2005c) asserted in *The German Ideology*: “It is not consciousness that determines life, but social life that determines consciousness” (p. 38). Thus, the limit of Hegel’s idealism lies in the fact that he elevated the law of development of spiritual history to an absolute law, separating it from the foundation of material reality.

In this way, Marx and Engels inherited and overcame Hegel’s philosophy. In spite of the criticism they addressed to Hegel, Marx and Engels still highly appreciated his dialectical and historical value. Marx believed that Hegel was the first to present the entire natural, historical, and spiritual world as a process, that is, in motion, in continuous change and development. Marxist philosophy directly

inherited Hegel's "rational core," which is the concept of the historical development of thought and the dialectic of negation. However, Marx (2005b) "put it on its own feet" (p. 180), which brought a complete transformation of this rational core, from idealism to materialism. For Hegel, the history of philosophy is the self-movement of the absolute spirit, while for Marx, the history of philosophy is a reflection of the development of human, social existence. If Hegel considered dialectical negation as the internal movement of ideas, then Marx understood it as the dialectics of material life, in which the subject of historical creation is the practical man. If Hegel considered philosophy to have reached the end point in his system, then Marx considered philosophy to be an unceasing process, linked to the development of social practice and revolution. Therefore, it can be said that Marx did not deny Hegel's thesis that "philosophy is the history of philosophy", but reformed it in the spirit of historical materialism, making it a principle of scientific research on the movement of thought in relation to objective reality.

Thus, Hegel's thesis "philosophy is the history of philosophy" has special significance in the history of philosophical thought: it elevated the history of ideas from a field of documentary recording to a science of the development of reason. It also paved the way for dialectical and historical-logical thinking, strongly influencing Marxist philosophy and many modern movements.

At the same time, an examination of the reception of this thesis reveals the limits of absolute idealism, that considers spirit to be the sole subject of history. However, it is precisely in this limit that there is potential for further developments, because, as Marx once remarked, Hegelian philosophy is a great legacy, but, to have real value, it must be understood in the reversal of materialism. Despite the need for said reversal, Marx (2005b) recognized that "the mystical character that dialectics has acquired in Hegel's hands does not in any way prevent Hegel from being the first to present comprehensively and consciously the general forms of movement of dialectics" (p. 494).

3.6 THE INFLUENCE AND MODERN SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THESIS "PHILOSOPHY IS THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY"

HEGEL'S THESIS THAT "philosophy is the history of philosophy" has left a deep mark on the entire world philosophy, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Recent scholarship continues to emphasize the reflexive and conceptual character of philosophy. As Frederick C. Beiser (2022) argues, philosophy can be understood as “primarily an analysis of concepts, a second-order discipline examining the concepts used by the sciences” (p. 6). Likewise, Terry Pinkard (2022) highlights that genuine freedom emerges only within shared forms of social life. This influence can be identified on three major directions of development of Western philosophical thought: dialectical materialism, phenomenology-existentialism, and post-Hegelian philosophy.

First of all, on the formation of dialectical materialism of Marx’s and Engels’s philosophy. As analyzed in the previous section, Marx and Engels directly inherited Hegel’s historical-dialectical concept, but placed it on a materialist standpoint. They considered the history of philosophy not as the self-development of absolute spirit, but as a reflection of the development of material life, of production and socio-economic forms. Consequently, the thesis “philosophy is the history of philosophy” was transformed into the principle of historical materialism according to which it is impossible to separate the development of thought from its material conditions of existence:

if we fully understand the economic situation of society in each given period, all historical phenomena can be explained very easily. Both the concepts and thoughts of each era of History, too, can be easily explained by the economic conditions of the time and by the economic conditions of life of that era and by the social and political relations originating from those conditions (Engels, 2005b, p. 166).

Thanks to this inheritance, Marx and Engels brought the study of the history of philosophy out of abstract speculation, into a science with laws and a concrete social-historical basis. In their works *The Holy Family* (Marx & Engels, 2005) and *The German Ideology* (Marx, 2005c), they proved that all philosophical doctrines, from ancient Greece to Hegel, were products of concrete historical conditions, reflecting the contradictions between productive forces and production relations, between humans and nature, and between social classes. Thus, Hegel’s influence was expressed in the historical-dialectical method, while his limitations were overcome by Marx with a materialist stance. From there, Marxist-Leninist philosophy continues to affirm the point of view of Hegel’s legacy, transformed by Marx’s and Engels’s materialism: “No philosophy exists outside

of history, and the history of philosophy is the history of the development of human thought in relation to social practice” (Lenin, 1981, p. 23).

Second, regarding the influence on phenomenology and existential philosophy, Hegel’s thesis also deeply influenced modern philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Alexandre Kojève. For Husserl, philosophy is to be understood as the self-referential process of consciousness, in which the history of philosophy is the history of conscious structures about the world. In *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl (1970) commented that European philosophy is the history of the European spirit finding its own meaning. This is a direct continuation of Hegel’s thought, as it considers history as a form of self-understanding of consciousness. For Heidegger, Hegel is the crystallizer of the Western metaphysical tradition. Although Heidegger criticized Hegel for identifying being with absolute thinking, he still inherited the historical principle of philosophy. Heidegger (1976) pointed out that the history of philosophy is the history of the forgetting of Being. That is, for him, philosophical research cannot be separated from tracing the history of the thought of Being, which is an approach that bears the clear imprint of Hegel’s thought. In particular, Alexandre Kojève in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1947) interpreted the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a philosophy of human history, in which the cognitive process of the spirit is the process of human struggle and liberation, or, in other words, the history of philosophy is the history of humanity becoming free. This statement directly recalls the spirit of Hegel: freedom of the spirit is the ultimate goal of history. Thus, from Hegel to phenomenology and existentialism, the thesis “philosophy is the history of philosophy” has been transformed from the level of absolute reason to the level of human existence, from metaphysical spirit to individual-historical consciousness.

Third, it is also important to consider the influence of Hegel’s thesis on analytic and postmodern philosophy. Although 20th-century analytical philosophy mainly developed in an unsystematic, unhistorical direction, some philosophers such as R. G. Collingwood or Hans-Georg Gadamer were still deeply influenced by Hegel. In *The Idea of History*, Collingwood (1946) argued that every thought can only be understood in its own historical context, and that philosophy is the act of reproducing thought in history. This is the reception of Hegel’s spirit in the form of a reflective history of philosophy, emphasizing the vitality of thinking in

the historical process. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1960), directly inherited Hegel's concept when he argued that understanding is a historical phenomenon. That is, all knowledge, including philosophical knowledge, is formed in a specific historical-traditional context, and not as a result of a purely individual, intellectual activity. In postmodern movements, although denying the "necessity and absoluteness" of Hegel's philosophical history, it is still impossible to escape his influence when viewing philosophy as a historical power-discourse (Foucault, Derrida). And, following Foucault (1972), it may be sustained that there is no philosophy outside the history of knowledge, and that is so because it is history that creates the conditions of possibility for thought.

G. W. F. Hegel's thesis that philosophy can only be understood through its own history is one of the most significant contributions of German classical philosophy to modern thought. The conception that philosophy is not a system of eternal truths existing outside of time, but rather, the historical self-consciousness of reason, marked a decisive turning point in the understanding of the nature of philosophy and exerted a profound influence on subsequent philosophical traditions, ranging from German historicism to critical theory and to postcolonial critique.

Frederick C. Beiser emphasizes that history occupies a central position within Hegel's philosophical system. According to him, for Hegel philosophy can only exist when it is situated within the historical context of ideas and social practices: philosophy "can only make sense if the philosopher is aware of the origins, context, and development of his doctrines" (Beiser, 2011, p. 19). This view radically transforms the traditional understanding of philosophy. Instead of treating philosophy as an attempt to discover immutable truths, Hegel regards philosophy as the conceptual reflection of a specific historical age. This is clearly expressed in his well-known claim that philosophy is "its own time captured in thought" (Hegel, 1991, p. 5). From this perspective, each philosophical system in history is not an error to be discarded but rather a stage in the development of reason.

Terry Pinkard stresses that Hegel's philosophy of history is not an *a priori* theory of historical laws but an attempt to explain how forms of human consciousness transform over time. As Pinkard (2017) writes, Hegel's philosophy of history investigates "how the collective enterprise of human beings—self-interpreting and self-developing—has moved from one shape of subjectivity to

another in the course of history” (p. 78). In Pinkard’s interpretation, the thesis that philosophy is the history of philosophy does not imply that history unfolds according to an inevitable law. Rather, it means that philosophy can only be understood through an analysis of the historical forms of reason.

From this standpoint, history is to be seen as a process in which human beings gradually develop new forms of understanding about themselves and the world. Philosophy therefore becomes a form of historical reflection: it does not stand outside history but constitutes the self-consciousness of history itself. Accordingly, Pinkard (2017, p. 5) emphasizes that for Hegel philosophy and history are fundamentally inseparable, a conception that exerted a profound influence on the German historicist tradition.

In his study of this tradition, Beiser argues that one of the core principles of historicism is that all values, ideas, and norms must be understood within their historical contexts. According to him, historicism maintains that concepts such as reason or value “can only be explained and understood in their social and historical contexts” (Beiser, 2011, p. 1). Yet Beiser also points out that Hegel’s philosophy of history does not simply amount to historical relativism. Within Hegel’s system, history possesses an inner orientation: the progressive development of the consciousness of freedom. As Beiser (2011) notes, in Hegel’s philosophy history is evaluated according to the degree to which a culture recognizes “freedom as the essence of spirit” (p. 24).

This synthesis of history and reason became a starting point for many modern philosophical debates. Within critical theory, Jürgen Habermas both appropriated and critically reassessed the Hegelian legacy. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas (1987) argues that Hegel’s philosophy marks an important transition from metaphysical philosophy toward a historical conception of reason. According to him, Hegel was the first thinker to conceptualize modernity as a process of the historical self-reflection of reason.

Habermas acknowledges that Hegel’s major contribution lies in understanding reason as a historically developing process. However, he also criticizes Hegel for transforming this historical development into a metaphysically necessary progression. For Habermas, the task of contemporary philosophy is not to construct a metaphysics of history but to analyze the communicative conditions under which rationality emerges in modern societies (Habermas, 1987, p. 59).

Beyond the debates within European philosophy, Hegel's conception of history has also become a target of criticism in postcolonial scholarship. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) argues that many modern historical frameworks—including those influenced by Hegel—have placed Europe at the center of world history. According to Chakrabarty, in much academic discourse “Europe remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories” (p. xiii). From this perspective, Hegel's philosophy of history contributed to the formation of a linear model of history in which other societies appeared as “belated” relative to Europe on the path toward modernity. Chakrabarty therefore argues that the task of postcolonial theory is to “provincialize Europe”, that is, to remove Europe from the position of the universal center of historical development and to open the possibility of a plural and multi-centered history (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 16).

Nevertheless, many scholars contend that Hegel's own historical framework can also provide conceptual resources for criticizing Eurocentric models of history. If philosophy is understood as the historical self-consciousness of reason, then the history of philosophy cannot be confined to a single cultural tradition. Rather, it should be interpreted as an ongoing dialogue among multiple philosophical traditions.

From this standpoint, the thesis that philosophy is the history of philosophy continues to hold significant relevance for contemporary philosophy. It highlights that philosophy is not a fixed system of immutable concepts but an ongoing process of historical reflection. As Pinkard (2017, p. 112) observes, Hegelian philosophy does not seek to construct a general theory of history but rather to understand how human communities create meaning in different historical contexts. In this sense, Hegel's philosophical legacy is both foundational and controversial. On the one hand, it establishes a framework for understanding philosophy as a historical process of reason. On the other hand, it has stimulated important critiques from both critical theory and postcolonial thought. Precisely this tension ensures that the thesis that philosophy is the history of philosophy remains one of the central issues in contemporary philosophical debates.

In summary, Hegel's thesis that “philosophy is the history of philosophy” has exerted a profound influence on contemporary philosophical debates. In postcolonial critique, as it has become an object of critical debate, encouraging

scholars to reconsider and reconstruct the history of philosophy in a more pluralistic and multi-centered manner.

Thus, Hegel's influence does not lie solely in the specific doctrines of his philosophy but also in the way he situates philosophy within the historical development of humanity. This perspective transforms philosophy into a form of historical self-reflection. It is precisely this feature that continues to make Hegel's thought relevant for addressing many global intellectual and ethical challenges in the 21st century.

3.7 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THESIS FOR CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH IN VIETNAM

G.W.F. HEGEL's well-known thesis that "philosophy is the history of philosophy" is not merely an ontological and epistemological assertion about the nature of philosophical thinking; it also carries profound methodological implications for the way philosophy should be studied and understood as a historical-cultural phenomenon. For Vietnam, this thesis is particularly meaningful in a context where philosophy faces the dual task of preserving the nation's intellectual traditions while simultaneously integrating into international philosophical discourse in an era of globalized knowledge (Hung, 2026). In recent years, especially after 2020, philosophical research in Vietnam has increasingly emphasized the need to reconstruct approaches to the history of thought in a systematic, interdisciplinary, and dialogical manner with world philosophy. New academic discussions have emerged around the identity of Vietnamese philosophy, the position of philosophy within the social sciences and humanities, and the role of philosophy in interpreting very diverse contemporary issues on social development such as globalization, digital transformation, environmental challenges, and the ethics of technology (Đức, 2006, p. 14). Philosophical researchers in Vietnam believe that "the existence of philosophy is not enough for the success of any country. The better the philosophy [*sic*] will get implemented, the more the country will grow. The country is a combination of multiple societies, and these societies are built by human beings" (Pham & Huong, 2024). In this context, Hegel's thesis offers an important methodological suggestion for viewing Vietnamese philosophy not as a collection of isolated ideas but as a

historical process reflecting both the development of national consciousness and the evolution of human reason. From Hegel's perspective, three core dimensions of value for contemporary philosophical research in Vietnam can be identified:

(1) methodological significance in approaching the history of Vietnamese thought;

(2) orientational significance for the development of a modern Vietnamese philosophy that is both national and universally human; and

(3) the role of shaping a reflective, critical philosophical thinking in education, research, and international academic integration.

In his research on the history of Vietnamese philosophy, Phong (2015) affirmed that “the historical nature and continuity of Vietnamese philosophical thought create a complete and coherent system throughout from feudalism to modernity” (p. 30). First, Hegel's thesis affirms a fundamental truth for every philosophical system: regardless of whether it takes a universal or national form, philosophy is always a product of history. No philosophy exists outside the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions that give rise to it. In Hegel's view, philosophy is not a static system of ideas but rather the form in which an age becomes conscious of itself through conceptual thought. This insight enables us to approach Vietnamese philosophy as an expression of the nation's process of self-consciousness throughout history. Vietnamese philosophy is not a closed or isolated philosophical system; rather, it is the result of long-term interactions and developments among multiple intellectual traditions, from Confucianism, to Buddhism, and to Daoism, and from the classical and medieval periods to the patriotic and revolutionary thought in the modern era, particularly instantiated by the philosophical thought of Ho Chi Minh (Huyen, 2025). Within this historical flow, Vietnamese philosophy clearly demonstrates a dialectical continuity. Each stage of thought does not represent a complete break with the past but rather a transformation and development of earlier intellectual elements within new historical circumstances. From a Hegelian perspective, this process can be understood as an *Aufhebung*, that is, as a “dialectical negation” in which the old is simultaneously overcome and preserved at a higher level. For example, in the history of Vietnamese thought, Confucianism—with its emphasis on moral governance and righteousness—formed the ethical and political foundations of traditional society; Buddhism, with its spirit of compassion and altruism,

contributed to shaping a deeply humanistic philosophy of life; while Ho Chi Minh's thought represents a creative synthesis between Eastern philosophical traditions and Western Marxism-Leninism, reflecting the highest level of national consciousness in the era of revolution and national liberation. In recent philosophical studies in Vietnam, particularly after 2020, many scholars have also emphasized the need to approach Vietnamese intellectual history as a continuous process of cultural and intellectual transformation. Research on modern Vietnamese philosophy, Ho Chi Minh's thought, and the Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist traditions increasingly highlights the historical and systemic character of national thought. This approach aligns with Nguyen Tai Thu's observation that "each stage of Vietnamese thought represents an effort by the nation to understand and transform the world; therefore, studying the history of thought is essentially studying the history of Vietnamese philosophy" (Thu, 2005, p. 312). Vietnamese philosophy differs from Western philosophy in that

philosophers mainly discuss socio-political, ethical, and religious issues, paying close attention to human morality, and rarely discussing the natural world, ontology, and the relationship between thought and existence, and human cognitive abilities. It often stems from pre-existing propositions rather than from objective reality. The majority of philosophical theses are still empirical, reflecting natural and social phenomena intuitively. Thus, Vietnamese philosophy is complex, with a blend of the three religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism). These elements make Vietnamese philosophy flexible, serving both material production and the struggle to protect national sovereignty and independence (Đuc, 2015, p. 38).

From Hegel's perspective, as shown before, the study of philosophy cannot be separated from the historical-logical method, because the history of philosophy itself embodies the concrete manifestation of the logical development of thought. According to Hegel (1994): "Logic is the inner form of the historical, while history is the realization of the logical" (p. 33). This perspective has particularly important methodological implications for philosophical research in Vietnam (Toan, 2024). It reminds us that the study of philosophical thought cannot merely consist of describing or listing viewpoints; rather, it must reconstruct the entire historical and social context that produced those ideas while simultaneously uncovering their internal logic of development.

In contemporary Vietnamese philosophical research, especially in works published after 2020 (Phạm & Hương, 2024), there has been an increasing emphasis on systematic and interdisciplinary approaches to the history of thought. Researchers no longer treat philosophical ideas as purely theoretical phenomena but situate them within broader relationships with political history, cultural traditions, religion, and social development. This tendency reflects a broader trend in global philosophical scholarship, where the history of philosophy is increasingly studied in relation to intellectual history and cultural history. In this context, Pham Van Đức's observation remains methodologically relevant:

Applying the historical logical method to philosophical research allows us to understand thought as a process of development rather than as fragmented pieces. In doing so, we avoid purely descriptive approaches and grasp the internal laws governing the development of Vietnamese philosophy (Đức, 2015, p. 74).

In the teaching of philosophy at Vietnamese universities, Hegel's spirit can also help transform the approach from studying isolated "doctrines" to understanding philosophy as the historical development of human thought. When philosophy is taught as a living history of ideas, students can recognize that each philosophical system is not an absolute truth but a stage in the self-development of reason. Thus, studying philosophy is not only about acquiring knowledge but also about cultivating reflective thinking and theoretical abstraction. These are precisely the intellectual qualities that Nguyen Trong Chuan (2006) emphasized when he argued that the task of philosophical research is "to restore and discover the meaning of these intellectual facts within the history of Vietnamese philosophical thought" (p. 30).

With regards to situating Vietnamese philosophy within the stream of world philosophy, another important implication of Hegel's thesis is that no philosophy exists outside the history of human philosophy. Every national philosophy represents a particular manifestation of the human spirit under specific historical and cultural conditions. Therefore, the study of Vietnamese philosophy must place it in a dialogical relationship with other philosophical traditions around the world. In the history of modern Vietnamese philosophy, Tran Duc Thao is one of the philosophers who exemplified such a dialogical approach. By

combining phenomenology with dialectical materialism, he opened a new path for Vietnamese philosophy to engage in dialogue with Western philosophical traditions. He asserted that: “Only through dialogue with the philosophical traditions of humanity can Vietnamese philosophy achieve genuine self-consciousness and creativity” (Thao, 1995, p. 65). In the contemporary era, when philosophy has become increasingly globalized, situating Vietnamese philosophy within the broader stream of world philosophy is even more necessary. Since 2020, many international academic forums have begun to pay greater attention to non-Western philosophical traditions, particularly Asian philosophy. This development creates new opportunities for Vietnamese philosophy to participate in global philosophical dialogues while asserting its own distinctive contributions to human knowledge. From a Hegelian perspective, this process can be understood as part of the self-development of universal reason. Vietnamese philosophy not only reflects the historical experience of the Vietnamese nation but also enriches the intellectual heritage of humanity.

This approach also allows to strengthen the identity and developmental orientation of modern Vietnamese philosophy. Indeed, Hegel’s thesis helps to affirm that the identity of Vietnamese philosophy is not a fixed entity but the result of a long historical process of intellectual movement and cultural exchange. Considering this perspective, several major trends of modern Vietnamese philosophy can be identified:

- a) The tradition development trend: it encompasses research on classical and medieval Vietnamese philosophy (Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism) that seeks to reconstruct the internal logic of the development of national thought (Thu, 2005, p. 315). Even contemporary studies by authors like Phạm & Hương (2024), or Phương (2023), researching the philosophical thought of Minh Menh, Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh, etc., are all based on Hegel’s philosophical methodology, and valued as “the product of rigorous study and a methodical approach to understanding the complexities of governance and society ” (Thanh, 2025, p. 59).
- b) The Western reception trend (Hung, 2017): it is the result of a selective engagement with Marxism-Leninism, phenomenology, existentialism,

and analytic philosophy to expand the theoretical foundations and research methodologies of Vietnamese philosophy.

- c) The practical action philosophy trend: it affirms the role of philosophy as a reflective and value-orienting tool for addressing contemporary social development issues (Vui, 2002, p. 7). While ancient Western philosophers were polymaths and natural scientists such as mathematicians, physicists, chemists, and biologists, Vietnamese philosophers were politicians, great figures, and national heroes who fought against foreign invaders. Therefore, they often wrote less and focused primarily on practical actions and activities. Consequently, when studying Vietnamese philosophy, authors like Hau (2018) propose that it is necessary to “study their philosophical thought through their behavior, attitudes, and practical activities” (p. 27).
- d) The interdisciplinary and applied philosophy trend (Vinh, 2024, p. 9): it connects philosophy with fields such as social sciences, environmental studies, technology, bioethics, and artificial intelligence—an increasingly prominent research direction in global philosophy since 2020. When viewed through the lens of the “historicity” emphasized by Hegel, these tendencies are not contradictory but rather complementary elements within the dialectical development of national philosophy.

Thus, the value of Hegel for Vietnamese philosophy does not lie in copying his philosophical system but in providing a methodological instrument through which we can understand ourselves within the broader history of human thought. As Pham Van Đức (2015) observed: “German classical philosophy, particularly Hegel, provided Vietnam with a method for viewing philosophy as a developing science inseparable from its own history” (p. 143).

Another profound contribution of Hegel’s thesis lies in its encouragement of reflective and critical thinking in philosophical research (Forero, 2022). If philosophy is the history of philosophy, then genuine philosophy can exist only through a continuous dialogue with the past through the critical examination and transcendence of the limitations of previous systems of thought. This spirit is particularly necessary for the development of Vietnamese philosophy in the contemporary context. When philosophy is placed in relation to the problems

of contemporary society such as globalization, digital transformation, environmental crises, or technological ethics, the task of philosophy is not merely to interpret classical systems of thought but also to reflect critically on the issues of the present age. This perspective aligns with the orientation for the development of the social sciences and humanities emphasized by the Communist Party of Vietnam, which states that philosophy should contribute to “reflecting, interpreting, and guiding the development of modern Vietnamese society” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, pp. 142-143). In this spirit, philosophical research cannot be separated from historical consciousness and the self-critical capacity of reason. As Hegel (1994a) emphasized: “Spirit understands itself only by retracing the path it has already traveled” (p. 15). From all the analyses above, it can be seen that Hegel’s thesis that “philosophy is the history of philosophy” carries profound theoretical and methodological significance for contemporary philosophical research in Vietnam. It affirms that Vietnamese philosophy can develop sustainably only if it is understood in terms of its historicity, continuity, and self-consciousness, while also being placed in continuous dialogue with the broader history of world philosophy. Studying philosophy, therefore, is not merely about acquiring knowledge; it is also about learning how human beings and even an entire nation come to understand themselves within the history of thought. It is precisely at this point that Hegel’s thesis retains its living significance for Vietnamese philosophy in the 21st century.

4. Conclusion

HEGEL’S THESIS “philosophy is the history of philosophy” is the crystallization of the dialectical spirit and historical concept of classical German philosophy. By considering the history of philosophy as the self-development of the absolute spirit, Hegel brought philosophy from abstract metaphysics to the science of the development of human reason. The great value of this thesis lies in the fact that it helps us to perceive philosophy as a process; a process in which truth is not something ready-made, but the result of the movement of history. Although limited by idealism, it is within that limitation that this thesis contains the “rational kernel”, that is, the dialectical historical concept of thought. Marx and Engels inherited and developed that kernel, turning it into the methodological

principle of historical materialism. From then on, philosophy is not only the self-consciousness of the spirit, but also the reflection and transformation of social reality. Today, in the context of globalization, value crisis and cognitive change, returning to Hegel's thesis has great significance, it reminds that philosophy can only survive when it is linked to history, when it becomes the voice of humanity's reflection on itself. Therefore, true philosophy is always the history of philosophy, that is, the self-consciousness of humanity about the process of developing its own thinking and reality.

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