



Title	Ernst Cassirer' s Philosophy of History and Its Foundations in Kant and Hegel
Author(s)	Hamada, Yosuke
Citation	人文学林. 2024, 1, p. 227-240
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/95141
rights	
Note	

The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive : OUKA

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

The University of Osaka

Ernst Cassirer's Philosophy of History and Its Foundations in Kant and Hegel

HAMADA Yosuke

This paper attempts to elucidate the fundamental features of Cassirer's philosophy of history by explaining his interpretation of and response to Kant's and Hegel's philosophies of history. Cassirer's philosophy of history is mainly based on Kant's idea about progress in moral freedom, but Hegel's idea of dialectic also influences it. The key to Cassirer's philosophy of history lies in the following: Human history can be viewed as a developmental process of individual moral freedom (understood as self-determination and self-responsibility) insofar as humans use and promote all the historically later, higher types of human consciousness (religious, artistic, scientific, etc.) and, through this use and promotion, repress the earliest and lowest type of human consciousness (mythical), which is only morally dangerous.

Keywords: Cassirer, Kant, Hegel, Philosophy of history

1. Introduction

In *An Essay on Man* (1944), one of his major works, Ernst Cassirer — a prominent philosopher of culture best known for his unique “philosophy of symbolic forms” — wrote the following for the philosophy of history:

It was not my design in this chapter [about history] to deal with the problems of a philosophy of history. A philosophy of history, in the traditional sense of the term, is a speculative and constructive theory of the historical process itself. An analysis of human culture need not enter upon this speculative question. It sets up for itself a more simple and modest task. It seeks to determine the place of historical knowledge in the organism of human civilization. (ECW23, 222)¹⁾

Here, Cassirer asserts that his philosophy does not address a central question frequently posed

1) ECW is the abbreviation for the edition of Cassirer's published collected works (Cassirer 1998–2009). ECN is the abbreviation for the edition of his unpublished works (Cassirer 1995–2022). The number following “ECW” or “ECN” represents the volume.

in the philosophy of history, namely, what the actual process of human history is and how it develops. (He does not refer to any specific philosopher or thinker here, but presumably Hegel is primarily in mind.)

This statement of Cassirer is true concerning the mentioned chapter in *An Essay on Man*, which treats the problem of history. But in reality, this is not true concerning his whole philosophy. Certainly, Cassirer's major interest lies not in the diachronic or historical investigation of the process (or progress) of human consciousness but in the synchronic elucidation of diverse types of human consciousness, all of which modern (European) people are supposed to possess. However, this does not imply that he had no interest in the issue of the historical process of human consciousness. On the contrary, he addressed this topic in other works, albeit not in a systematic or exhaustive manner.

Cassirer did not leave us with any writing that systematically and concretely illustrates his own philosophy of history. However, we can discern the key factors of his philosophy of history by reviewing various passages from his corpus, which is the purpose of this article. To this end, differently from the approaches of previous studies on his philosophy of history (Rudolph 2003; Scholtz 2003),²⁾ I focus on Cassirer's interpretation, reception, and rebuilding of Kant's and Hegel's philosophy of history. This is because, in my view, these figures gave the key inspirations to Cassirer's philosophy of history: Kant as the most exemplary and influential philosopher in many regards and Hegel as a crucial inspiration for his historical-developmental thought concerning human consciousness.

In (2.1), I will first explain how Cassirer understands the core of Kant's philosophy of history. Subsequently, in (2.2), I will describe how Cassirer sharply contrasts Kant's philosophy of history and Hegel's, criticizing the latter. Then, in (3.1), I will argue that Cassirer's philosophy of history is based on Kant's and that despite his harsh critique, it owes an important idea to Hegel. Finally, in (3.2), I will elucidate the key features of Cassirer's own philosophy of history.

2. Cassirer's Understanding of Kant's and Hegel's Philosophy of History

2.1 Core of Kant's Philosophy of History

A claim that Hegel is a greater German philosopher than Kant would be contentious and controversial. One could argue, however, that Kant does not occupy the most prominent

2) See footnote 9. Incidentally, books or articles mainly aiming to clarify Cassirer's philosophy of history seem to be scarce.

position among so-called German idealists concerning the philosophy of history. Many would likely agree that Hegel's philosophy has been much more influential than Kant's in this subdiscipline.

Even if we set aside Hegel's considerable impact on the understanding of historicity in subsequent social and political thought, Hegel's philosophy seems to have a much more historical character than Kant's because Hegel deals with the problem of historicity much more directly and in much greater detail. Furthermore, Kant's major works, the three *Critiques* — which are dedicated to theoretical, ethical, and aesthetic (and teleological) problems respectively — focus on ahistorical problems of universal knowledge. This indicates that Kant was not primarily concerned with the problem of historicity; in other words, he viewed ahistorical problems as more fundamental.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Kant ignored the problem of historicity or that his philosophy of history is inconsequential. Cassirer even considers Kant a pioneer of the Hegelian developmental view of history in that he discusses history as “progress in the consciousness of freedom” (ECW25, 266–267). In addition, Cassirer argues that Kant's philosophy of history addresses one fundamental point correctly, whereas Hegel makes a critical error on the same point.

I will now explain how Cassirer understands the core of Kant's historical thinking. For this explanation, however, there is one point to note in advance: In some texts, Cassirer attempts to equate his own philosophy of *culture* (philosophy of symbolic forms) with Kant's philosophy of *history*. As will be demonstrated in this section, he refers to Kant's philosophy of history as a philosophy of culture. In my opinion, such an identification is somehow dubious because Kant's and Cassirer's philosophies are quite different at not a few points, though Cassirer's philosophy of culture is based on Kant's transcendental philosophy. Furthermore, it should also be taken into account that Cassirer's conception of “culture” is much wider than Kant's.³⁾

Therefore, Cassirer's identification of Kant's philosophy of history with his own philosophy of culture is problematic for the precise understanding of Kant's philosophy of history. However, important here is not the *accuracy* of Cassirer's interpretation of Kant's philosophy of history or culture, but the way of his interpretation.

According to Cassirer, his philosophy of culture and Kant's philosophy of history share a fundamental: the idea of the intersection of *history* and *ethics*. Identifying his and Kant's

3) According to Cassirer, *any* human consciousness or activity is cultural (or symbolic) (ECW23, 30). In contrast, “culture” for Kant refers to only one of four necessary and fundamental stages in the *educational* process of human consciousness and not to all human activities. From lowest to highest, Kant calls these stages discipline, culture (cultivation), civilization, and moralization (Kant 2011b, 437–448).

philosophy, Cassirer argues as follows in his 1936 lecture “Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture”: History and ethics are two different fields that cannot be reduced to each other. However, these two fields are so intimately bound to each other that “[t]o determine the relative limits between the two spheres, to define their relationship and their peculiarity, proved to be one of the most difficult problems in the evolution of philosophical thought” (ECN7, 114). For:

Both of them [ethics and history (or culture)] are centered in the same point: they are, so to speak, various manifestations and interpretations of the same universal subject: that of Freedom. It is freedom, or, what means the same for Kant, it is the autonomy of reason that is the true and ultimate aim of human history. / All the various problems of a philosophy of culture [or history] may, therefore, be summed up and concentrated in the question, in which way and by which means this autonomy is to be reached. ... According to what in Kantian philosophy is called the primacy of pure practical reason, *we cannot draw in this philosophy a sharp line of demarcation between the problems of morality and the problems of cultural life [or history]*. (ECN7, 114–115; italics added for emphasis)

Thus, Cassirer claimed that in Kant’s philosophical view, it is not just difficult but actually impossible to clearly distinguish the sphere of ethics (or morality) from that of history.

It is noteworthy here that Cassirer refers to freedom (or the autonomy of reason) as “the true and ultimate aim of human history” and to Kantian “primacy of pure practical reason,” because these references indicate his important following contention. For Kant, the problems of history (or culture) and ethics (or morality) are inseparably connected but not equally significant; more specifically, the sphere of *ethical* problems takes precedence over that of historical problems.

In Cassirer’s view, Kant holds that we can hope to obtain a genuinely philosophical answer to questions about human history (or the history of human consciousness) only after “having laid down the general principle of morality” (ECN7, 114). Cassirer writes: “[Kant’s] concept of history and development becomes purely absorbed into his ethical doctrines. The meaning and ultimate purpose of history and all spiritual existence become clear only in the thought of freedom and moral consciousness. *Thus, for Kant, ... the reason of history is based on ethics* (ECW16, 106, translation mine; italics added for emphasis).”⁴⁾

4) Although, as stated previously, the accurateness of Cassirer’s interpretation is not the purpose of this article, it appears that his understanding of Kant’s philosophy of history is correct here. Kant argues in his treatise “Idea for a Universal History

This interpretation gives a key to understanding Cassirer's philosophy of history, as illustrated below (3). However, I will now turn to Cassirer's understanding of the contrast between Kant's and Hegel's historical philosophies, because this contrast serves the purpose of this article. That is, it illuminates a central feature of Cassirer's own historical philosophy.

2.2 Contrast between Kant's Philosophy of History and Hegel's

Cassirer criticizes Hegel's philosophy of history for exceeding the limits of verifiable knowledge and claiming to know every step of the history of human consciousness in minute detail (ECN7, 117). However, Cassirer's most important criticism is directed at Hegel's understanding of "freedom." According to Cassirer, the fundamental difference between Kant's philosophy of history and Hegel's is reflected in their respective approaches to freedom, a central concept for both philosophers (ECW25, 267).

Cassirer explains the concept of freedom as the foundation of *Kantian* ethics as follows: For Kant, freedom means moral freedom or the autonomy of individual will, which can be defined as "self-control and individual responsibility" (Cassirer 1979, 257), that is, as self-determination and self-responsibility. In contrast, according to Cassirer, the *Hegelian* concept of freedom refers to the independence of the *absolute mind* (or spirit; *Geist* in German), which is very different from the Kantian concept of freedom as the autonomy of the *individual* will.⁵⁾ Cassirer writes regarding the meaning of freedom for *Hegel*:

We cannot restrict freedom to morality; for in doing so we should include it into the limits of mere subjectivity, of subjective reflection. But freedom means much more; it means the ultimate end of the absolute Mind and at the same time the path he had to traverse in order to come to this end. ... The way of the absolute Mind, by which it comes to itself, is a necessary one; but the end of this way is the absolute self-cognition and that means the absolute Freedom of Mind. (ECN7, 117)

In another work (1939), Cassirer critically dealt with what results from such a Hegelian connotation of freedom. There, he contrasts naturalistic or historical determinism (represented

with a Cosmopolitan Aim" that it is a useful and possible philosophical task to postulate a *plan* or aim of nature that can only be achieved through the history of humans. In addition, Kant viewed this plan or aim of nature (or humans) as the perfection of *morality or freedom* (Kant 2011a).

5) It is conceivable that contemporary Hegel scholars are unwilling to accept such an absolutist or anti-individualist interpretation. As a matter of fact, almost all Hegel scholars appear to argue that Hegel reconciled the importance of the collective and the individual (Parra-Ayala 2023, 2).

by Comte, Saint-Beuve, Renan, Taine, Spengler, and *Hegel*)⁶⁾ with eighteenth-century humanism (represented by Winckelmann, Herder, Goethe, Humboldt, Schiller, and *Kant*) and emphasizes that naturalistic or historical determinism, such as Hegel's historical determinism, erroneously seeks to abolish the power of individuality, which, as in Kant, serves as the theoretical foundation for morality (ECW22, 151).

Cassirer sees in Hegel's philosophy of history not only a theoretical error, but also a social and political danger. To clarify this danger, he cites a passage from Hegel's "System der Sittlichkeit," or, more precisely, he *claims* to be quoting from that work of Hegel. Actually, it appears that Cassirer mistakenly quoted an introductory essay from another person to the English translation of Hegel's work.⁷⁾ Such an inaccurate quotation is not a fair way to evaluate Hegel's philosophy, but it is still helpful to illustrate how *Cassirer understood* the relation between the absolute mind (as state) and moral freedom in Hegel's philosophy.

Cassirer *purportedly* quotes Hegel as follows: "The State is the self-certain absolute mind [which acknowledges no abstract rules of good and bad, shameful and mean, craft and deception]" (ECW25, 261).⁸⁾ He then makes the following critical comment on this quotation.

Here is, in a sense, a complete transvaluation of values, a reversal of all previous standards. According to this revaluation there is no longer any moral obligation for the state. Morality holds for the individual will, not for the universal will of the state. If there is any duty to the state, it is the duty to preserve itself. (ECW25, 261)

Therefore, according to Cassirer, by giving all the rights and powers to the absolute mind (as a state), Hegel's theory abolishes the Kantian and indispensable element of morality, that is, individual freedom, and thus undermines the moral foundation of a society or a state. In one posthumous fragment, Cassirer writes even as follows, referring to *Nazi Germany*: "I think ... that Hegel's philosophy is to a very large degree responsible for our modern theories of the omnipotent state" (ECN16, 187).

In sum, Cassirer believes that the Kantian notion of freedom — i.e., individual moral freedom as self-determination and self-responsibility — is absolutely indispensable for a sane society or state, whereas the Hegelian notion of freedom — the freedom of absolute mind — is

6) Cassirer categorizes naturalistic or historical determinism into three categories: physical or positivist (Comte, Saint-Beuve, Renan, and Taine), psychological (Spengler), and metaphysical (Hegel) (ECW22, 149–152).

7) The alleged quotation is found from a work by the Scottish philosopher William Wallace (Wallace 1894, clxxxii).

8) Cassirer adds square brackets and the words between them.

moral-theoretically false and socially dangerous.

This view is also reflected in Cassirer's understanding of *historical processes* (or *progress*) in Kant and Hegel's philosophies of history. As mentioned in the introduction, Cassirer regards Kant as a pioneer of the Hegelian philosophy of history on one important point. "Every thinker of the eighteenth century," says Cassirer, "could have subscribed to Hegel's definition of the history of the world as "*progress in the consciousness of freedom.*" As a matter of fact, it was not Hegel but Kant who had first given this definition" (ECW25, 266–267; italics added for emphasis).

This means that for both Kant and Hegel, human history or the history of human consciousness (or spirit) can be defined as "progress in the consciousness of freedom." However, as explained above, in Cassirer's view, this definition has a very different meaning for Kant and Hegel, respectively, according to their understanding of *freedom*. For the latter, this definition means the gradual historical development of the absolute mind, which not only surpasses, but even suppresses, individual moral autonomy. For the former, contrarily, it means the gradual historical development of individual's moral autonomy, that is, the gradual progress of self-determination and self-responsibility. Obviously, by drawing this contrast, Cassirer intends to imply that the former, i.e., Kant is correct. For Cassirer, Kant is not only the originator of the definition of the history of human consciousness as "progress in the consciousness of freedom," but also its *authentic* interpreter.

I will now demonstrate that Cassirer's philosophy of history is predominately based on this Kantian definition of history, and simultaneously explain that despite Cassirer's harsh criticisms of Hegel, his philosophy of history is also influenced by Hegel's view on *development*.⁹⁾

3. Cassirer's Philosophy of History

3.1 Kant's and Hegel's influence

As referred to at the outset of this essay, although Cassirer states in his chapter on history in *An Essay on Man* that he does not address the issue of historical process, this is only true for this chapter. In the following passage from the same book, for instance, Cassirer's view on historical process is clearly articulated.

9) Enno Rudolph, who sees the main influence upon Cassirer's philosophical-historical thought in Herder, maintains that Cassirer took leave of the philosophy of history in general; that is, his philosophy is irrelevant to Kant's and Hegel's philosophy of history (Rudolph 2003). Nonetheless, as argued in this paper, it appears to be undeniable that Cassirer had his own philosophy of history, which was influenced by Kant and Hegel. Gunter Scholtz agrees with me on this point, though, unlike me, he does not emphasize the importance of Kant's influence (Scholtz 2003).

The question as to what language, myth, and religion ›are‹ cannot be answered without a penetrating study of their historical development. / ... All human works arise under particular historical and sociological conditions. But we could never understand these special conditions unless we were able to grasp the general structural principles underlying these works. In our study of language, art, and myth the problem of meaning takes precedence over the problem of historical development. (ECW23, 76–77; italics added for emphasis)

On the one hand, it is undeniable that for Cassirer, “the problem of meaning,” that is, the *ahistorical* problem of how typical modes of human consciousness (such as mythical, linguistic, artistic or scientific consciousness called symbolic forms) are more important than the historical problem of how human consciousness develops or developed. On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that he also argues that this historical problem must be considered if we are to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ahistorical problem. In fact, he grapples with the historical, processual problem in some of his writings, despite the fact that his interest in this issue appears to have waned considerably in his later years.¹⁰⁾

In “Critical Idealism as Philosophy of Culture,” Cassirer attempts to distance Kant and himself from Hegel by stating that Kant’s and his critical idealism “does not aim at a universal formula expressing the absolute nature of mind and the necessary sequence of its single phenomena [*sic*] nor does it claim to predict and prescribe the future course of the history of culture” (ECN7, 118). In this way, Cassirer distances himself from Hegel’s philosophy of history’s absolute, predictable, and specific character. Nevertheless, despite this separation, it is undeniable that he is influenced by this historical philosophy (Scholtz 2003, Möckel 2004).

As previously mentioned, Cassirer’s interest in explaining the mechanism of the developmental process of human consciousness appears to have waned toward the end of his life. Nevertheless, he never abandoned the notion that human consciousness develops in a particular, non-random manner, from the first and lowest level of human consciousness (the earliest symbolic form) to the highest.¹¹⁾ Thus, similar to Hegel, Cassirer presupposes a certain *determined universal* way of development in the history of human consciousness. Hegel’s

10) At least, it seems to me that he discusses the developmental process of human consciousness considerably more frequently in his middle writings (from the late 1920s to the early 1930s) than in his later works.

11) In his later works, he writes, for example, “We must try to follow up, step by step, the gradual evolution that leads from the first dawnings of symbolic thought [i.e., that of human spirit or consciousness] to its achievement, to its most perfect and refined forms. By slowly and patiently pursuing this way we may hope to reach our aim: to come to a philosophical concept of man that comprises the whole of his fundamental faculties and his most characteristic activities” (Cassirer 2005, 251). Cf. also ECW23, 223.

influence here is evident not only due to his manner, but also because Cassirer named this development "dialectic" in the very Hegelian sense (ECW12, 275–306).

Generally speaking, he conceives this universal way of development as follows: The historically earliest and lowest type of human consciousness (symbolic form) is mythical. This consciousness inevitably and "dialectically" develops into religious consciousness, aesthetics, and scientific consciousness, which is the highest level (ECW12, 275–306; ECW16, 304–311; ECW23, 223).¹²⁾ Importantly, when one type of human consciousness (symbolic form) develops to another higher type, the former type does not disappear. Rather, the earlier mode remains within the repertoire of human consciousness. Consequently, according to Cassirer, contemporary individuals possess all modes of human consciousness (all symbolic forms) and can choose to employ one or more of them (ECW23, 184).

For Cassirer, this historical progress of human consciousness has two major implications that are closely related to each other. On the one hand, the historical progress of human consciousness implies that modern human consciousness has historically and gradually liberated itself from sensory and sensuous perceptions or activities and moved toward abstract and *theoretical* thinking or activities (ECW11, 125–127; ECW13, 319–321). On the other hand, it indicates that human consciousness has historically and gradually moved away from animalistic or purely emotional reactions or activities and toward *morally rational* or *ethical* thought or behavior.

Therefore, under Hegel's dialectic thought, Cassirer understands the history of human consciousness as a dialectic self-liberation process in both *theoretical* and *moral* (or *ethical*) respect. It is already shown that Cassirer identifies his philosophy (of culture) with Kant's philosophy of history, and, according to him, Kant's philosophy of history is founded on his ethics. Accordingly, the concept of freedom in Cassirer's philosophy of history is also *primarily* considered *ethical* or *moral* and is to be understood not in the Hegelian, but in the *Kantian* sense, that is, in the sense of *individual* moral freedom (as self-determination and self-responsibility).

Now, I will describe in more concrete way how Cassirer built his own philosophy of history on the basis of such Kantian and Hegelian ideas, and thereby accomplish the purpose of this article.

12) The linguistic consciousness is regarded as a unique type that pervades all human consciousness (ECW16, 125, 234).

3.2 Cassirer's own philosophy of history

According to Cassirer, among the various universal types of human consciousness (symbolic forms), only mythical consciousness, as the historically earliest and lowest type, is morally dangerous. It is dangerous because it has little or no self-consciousness and therefore has no base for moral freedom in the sense of self-determination or self-responsibility (ECW12, 205; ECW23, 114).¹³⁾ In contrast, all later and higher types of consciousness are moral, or morally good. In other words, the historical dialectic progression from mythical consciousness (symbolic form) to *any* other type of consciousness signifies a *moral* progression. In this sense, we should understand Cassirer's following passage:

Human culture taken as a whole may be described as the process of man's progressive self-liberation. Language, art, religion, science, are various phases in this process. In all of them man discovers and proves a new power—the power to build up a world of his own, an “ideal” world. (ECW23, 244)

Similarly, but from the opposite point of view, Cassirer also writes: “In a certain sense the whole history of human civilization may be described as a continuous combat against mythical conceptions” (ECN9, 203. Cf. also ECW25, 275). An important implication of this sentence is that a historical moral development (a development from mythical to another higher type of consciousness) is not just given but is to be *won*.

In this sentence, Cassirer is warning about the danger in “the whole history”; however, he has in mind one concrete danger, that is, the danger posed by totalitarian Nazi Germany. Cassirer, or more precisely, the late Cassirer, who was directly confronted with this danger, came to think that the historical development of moral sense does not always advance to a higher level but that in certain historical instances, such as Nazi Germany, the once-tamed, archaic, and morally perilous mythical consciousness reappears in full force. Accordingly, for (the late) Cassirer, a moral development can be gained only when we combat against mythical consciousness by means of the moral powers of higher modes of human consciousness other than mythical mode.

To understand Cassirer's (late) philosophy, this idea should not be ignored. Nevertheless, except in cases that are everywhere possible, but exceptional, Cassirer viewed human history overall as a developmental progress of freedom in the Kantian sense, that is, individual moral

13) Mythical consciousness, which lacks self-consciousness or self-determination, is devoid of morally reprehensible intent. Therefore, it is not immoral, but just *amoral*.

freedom.

As a strict deontologist, Kant would reject Cassirer's claim that *all* higher forms of human consciousness (such as religious, linguistic, aesthetic, and scientific consciousness) are *directly moral*. Or, it is even conceivable that Kant would completely reject Cassirer's moral philosophical thought, since the latter's philosophy does not deal with a type of consciousness that is *specialized for moral problems*, which could serve as an analog to Kant's practical reason. Despite these significant differences in *moral* philosophy, however, at least according to Cassirer, his and Kant's philosophies of *history* share the same fundamental assumptions: Human history as a whole can be defined as the gradual advancement of individual moral freedom (i.e., self-determination and self-responsibility).

To avoid misunderstanding, it should be emphasized here that Cassirer's philosophy of history never supports historical *determinism*. As the concept of the return of a powerful mythical consciousness in Nazi Germany demonstrates, Cassirer does not argue that the development of moral freedom is predetermined regardless of the actions of individuals. Cassirer concludes his essay "Naturalistic and Humanistic Foundation of the Philosophy of Culture" on this note with a comparison between Kantian (and his own) humanism and Hegelian determinism:

If one goes back again from the Hegelian meaning of idea (Idee) to the Kantian, i.e., from the meaning of idea as an "absolute power" to the meaning of idea as an "infinite task," one must then, of course, renounce the speculative optimism of the Hegelian view of history. However, at the same time, one, therefore, renounces also the fatalistic pessimism [like that of Oswald Spengler] with its prediction and vision of decline. [In the Kantian idea,] action (das Handeln) has, once again, the leeway to decide by itself and of its own responsibility. Moreover, now, it knows that *the direction and the future of culture* [or *history*] *depend on the art of such a decision*. (ECW22, 166, translation mine; italics added for emphasis)

The future of human history, according to Cassirer, does not unfold in a predetermined manner, as Hegel, Spengler, and others assumed; rather, the future of humanity depends on individual decisions, more specifically, decisions based on individual moral freedom as self-determination and self-responsibility. Consequently, the developmental process of individual moral freedom is neither a simple fact nor a predetermined course of history, but rather a never-ending *task* that each of us must perpetually undertake. Human history as a whole can be characterized as the

advancement of individual moral freedom, but only insofar as humans as moral (self-determining and self-responsible) individuals persevere in their efforts to promote their own morality (self-determination and self-responsibility). For Cassirer, the ultimate aim of human history would be for *every* individual to become fully self-determining and self-responsible and to continue promoting self-determination and self-responsibility in herself and all other individuals.

If we combine this idea with Cassirer's other idea explained above that *all* higher types of consciousness (symbolic forms) — religious, linguistic, artistic, scientific, etc. — other than the mythical one are moral or morally good, we can describe the core of Cassirer's philosophy of history in a more concrete way: Human history as a whole can be viewed as the progression of individual moral freedom in tandem with the development of mythical consciousness from its earliest and lowest stages to higher stages. This universal process of history can still be sustained so long as we — as morally free individuals — continue to promote the advancement of individual moral freedom by advancing all higher types of consciousness, thereby combating mythical consciousness.

4. Conclusion

The key to Cassirer's philosophy lies in Kant's idea that human history as a whole can be seen as a progress of individual moral freedom in the sense of self-determinability and self-responsibility. In addition, although Cassirer harshly criticizes Hegel's idea that human history is the process of self-development of the absolute Mind superior to individuals, his philosophy of history is significantly influenced by Hegel's idea of *dialectic* development.

Combining this Hegelian and Kantian historical view with his own philosophy of culture named "philosophy of symbolic forms," Cassirer built his own philosophy of history,¹⁴⁾ whose main feature can be summarized as follows: History of human consciousness (spirit) as a whole can be viewed as the progression of individual moral freedom in tandem with the dialectic self-development of human consciousness, insofar as humans spontaneously and continuously promote this moral freedom by employing and promoting all the higher types of human consciousness (religious, artistic, linguistic, scientific, etc.) and combating the earliest and morally perilous type of consciousness (mythical).

In addition to this summary, I will conclude this article by indicating the close connection

14) This does not exclude that there can be other important influences on Cassirer's philosophy of history.

between Cassirer's philosophy of history and Kant's famous Enlightenment motto: "*Sapere aude!* Have courage to make use of your own understanding!" (Kant 1996a, 17). Cassirer provides the following interpretation of this Kantian maxim:

This slogan is ... at the same time the motto of all human history, because what can be described as only genuine "becoming" in the spiritual sense consists in the process of self-liberation, that is, in the progress from natural bondage to the spirit's autonomous awareness of itself and its task. (ECW8, 219–220, translation mine)

In a nutshell, for Kant, the ideal of enlightenment is at the same time the ideal of "all human history."

From this interpretation and from the fact that Cassirer's philosophy of history is primarily based on Kant, we can naturally deduce that the slogan of Cassirer's philosophy of history (and that of his ethics) must be the following: Have the courage to use or encourage others to use morally good types of consciousness (symbolic forms), that is, all the higher types of consciousness — religious, linguistic, artistic, scientific, etc. — other than the morally perilous mythical one, in order to make oneself and other humans increasingly self-determining and self-responsible. In this very sense, we can also read Kant's another famous motto (of ethics) as the motto of Cassirer's philosophy of history: "*So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*" (Kant 1996b, 80).

References

- Cassirer, E. (1979), "Philosophy and Politics," in E. Cassirer, *Symbol, Myth, and Culture. Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935–1945*, ed. D. P. Verene, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, pp. 242–267.
- Cassirer, E. (1995–2022) [ECN], *Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, ed. K. C. Köhnke et al., Hamburg: Meiner.
- Cassirer, E. (1998–2009) [ECW], *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburger Ausgabe), ed. B. Recki, Hamburg: Meiner.
- Kant, I. (1996a), "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?," in I. Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. M. J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 11–22.
- Kant, I. (1996b), "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," in I. Kant, *Practical Philosophy*,

- trans. and ed. M. J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 37–108.
- Kant, I. (2011a), “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim,” in I. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. G. Zöllner / R. B. Loudon, trans. M. Gregor et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 107–120.
- Kant, I. (2011b), “Lectures on Pedagogy,” in I. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. G. Zöllner / R. B. Loudon, trans. M. Gregor et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 436–485.
- Möckel, C. (2004), “Hegels ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’ als Vorbild für Cassirers ‘Philosophie der symbolischen Formen,’ ” in A. Arndt and E. Müller (eds.), *Hegels “Phänomenologie des Geistes” heute*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, pp. 256–275.
- Parra-Ayala, A. F. (2023), “Individual Freedom against Liberalism: Hegel’s Nonliberal Individualism,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 61(4), pp. 622–637.
- Rudolph, E. (2003), “Symbol und Geschichte. Cassirers Abschied von der Geschichtsphilosophie,” in E. Rudolph, *Ernst Cassirer im Kontext*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 159–168.
- Scholtz, G. (2003), “Dilthey, Cassirer und die Geschichtsphilosophie,” in T. Leinkauf (ed.), *Dilthey und Cassirer. Die Deutung der Neuzeit als Muster von Geistes — und Kulturgeschichte*, Hamburg: Meiner, pp. 127–148.
- Wallace, W. (1894), “Five Introductory Essays in Psychology and Ethics,” in G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. xi–cciv.